

# **The Felicitous Space**

**of**

**Elizabeth von Arnim**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

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of

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Jennifer Jane Bollard

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This thesis is dedicated to an older woman who passionately loved and cared for her garden, but recognised her increasing frailty.

One day she mentioned to her husband that she would need help in order to keep her garden looking beautiful.

The woman went out, and on her return home found every cherished plant and flower uprooted and gone.

A desert of bark chips filled the space where a garden once flourished.

The woman was found weeping some time later, in an upstairs room.

## AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,  
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.  
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool  
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.  
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band  
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

—ADRIENNE RICH

## Chronology

*Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Macmillan 1898.  
*The Solitary Summer*, Macmillan 1899.  
*The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*, Macmillan 1904.  
*Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, Smith and Elder 1907.  
*The Caravaners*, Smith and Elder 1909.  
*The Pastor's Wife*, Smith and Elder 1914.  
*In the Mountains*, Macmillan 1920.  
*Vera*, Macmillan 1921.  
*The Enchanted April*, Macmillan 1922.  
*All the Dogs of My Life*, Heinemann 1936.

## Abbreviations

<i>Elizabeth and Her German Garden</i>	(EGG)
<i>The Solitary Summer</i>	(SS)
<i>The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen</i>	(E in R)
<i>In the Mountains</i>	(I M)
<i>All the Dogs of My Life</i>	(D of L)
<i>The Enchanted April</i>	(EA)
<i>Vera</i>	(V)
<i>Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther</i>	(S & A)
<i>The Pastor's Wife</i>	(PW)
<i>The Caravaners</i>	(C's)

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on an ensemble of the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim which, when examined intratextually as well as intertextually, reveals an interanimation of her life with her text: this includes her life as lived; her life as imagined and her life as written. The thesis shows how these distinctions collapse in her writing.

The literary theoretical concept of “the author as dead” is therefore limited, in this case, within the context of the interanimation and the perceived trajectory of self definition that it forms out of Elizabeth von Arnim’s writing. The importance of Elizabeth von Arnim as Author will be argued as having significant implications towards her life long quest for felicity and, more specifically, female-centred, felicitous space.

The interanimation of the three distinctions involving her life and text is explored within the context of Elizabeth von Arnim’s major thematic concern: that of female-centred space. The thesis compares and contrasts the ability of Elizabeth von Arnim, together with her female protagonists, to create, protect, and maintain female-centred space.

While Elizabeth von Arnim is popularly known as a romance writer, this thesis explores and reveals her work to be a deliberate and consistent ironic subversion of patriarchal institutions and their ideologies, including the social construction and ideology of romantic love that was central and embedded in Elizabeth von Arnim’s culture and affirmed in the romance genre.



*My soul is a passionate dancer, she dances to hidden music which only I can hear. You may tell me to be calm and demure but my soul does not listen and goes on dancing; if the dance were to stop it would be the end of me.*

— BETTINA VON ARNIM

*Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak.*

— JULIA KRISTEVA

*[T]here were days last winter when I danced for sheer joy out in my frost-bound garden in spite of my years and children. But I did it behind a bush, having a due regard for the decencies.*

— ELIZABETH VON ARNIM

# Introduction

Through an analysis of the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim, this thesis will demonstrate the importance of female-centred space for women. Female-centred space can be created when a woman recognises that which has been lost of her own identity while having to exist in male-dominated patriarchal space. Historically, female-centred space has been threatening to patriarchy, since it exists on the boundary of androcentric space and is, therefore, a place of potential independence and empowerment for women. It was the recognition of that which had been lost of her Self<sup>1</sup> in patriarchal space, her creation of female-centred space, as well as an ability to protect and maintain the space, that enabled Elizabeth von Arnim to emerge as a writer. In female-centred space, she became conscious of using the writing process as a continuing path for revision of her life's contrasting experiences, and consequently, developed and expanded her sense of who she was, together with a cultivation of knowledge, pleasure, and wisdom.

It has been, and still is, difficult for many women to create, protect and maintain female-centred space, yet for some women it is a struggle to begin to consciously acknowledge their need for such a space. Elizabeth von Arnim's writing contains a critique of the reasons why this has been so. In this thesis, female-centred space will also be described as felicitous space. This is because it is a space where women, as Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates, can felicitously pursue a quest for the development of a new female-centred identity, while still having to function within the limitations and

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<sup>1</sup> "Self," in upper case in the thesis, is used deliberately to indicate the significance of the concept of self in Elizabeth von Arnim's personal and literary career.

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oppressions of patriarchal space and time.

Mary Daly describes a space generating felicity where it is possible for a woman to experience her Self “without the contortions of mind, will, feeling, and imagination demanded of women by [patriarchy]” (Daly 1985, 156). The movement to this space, she says, is not merely escape but is “the deep confrontation between being and non-being” (Daly 1985, 156). Writing, for Elizabeth von Arnim, made the difference between being and non-being. She was able to experience herself in a way that promoted a deeper understanding of her Self, her thoughts, her actions, her intentions and motivations, as well as the cultivation of a “self affection” (Irigaray 1991, 125), the latter being a term which Luce Irigaray uses within the context of women articulating their pleasure.

Gaston Bachelard uses the term “felicitous space” in a way that relates well to the qualities of female-centred space. He states that felicitous space “concentrates being within limits that protect” (Bachelard 1986, xxxii). It is not a hostile space, he says, but rather one which is loved and which “bears the essence of the notion of home” (Bachelard 1986, 5). The garden at Nassenheide “[bore] the essence of the notion of home” for Elizabeth von Arnim, whereas indoors, for her, was a hostile space.

It was having access to a garden of her own that enabled Elizabeth von Arnim to identify her need for a place where her soul could feel at home and, as she says, “[her] soul may have time to grow” (SS, 3). Elizabeth von Arnim’s notion of the soul differs from the patriarchal belief in the soul as

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separate from the body, or the religious belief in the soul needing salvation through a male god and his son. Elizabeth's concept of the soul centres upon the idea that the soul is animated by the body and enlivened by the body's senses. It is concerned with a quality or dimension of experiencing life in the present that has richness of expression, depth and meaning, rather than in an uncertain after-life.

In her autobiographical writing, Elizabeth von Arnim frequently speaks of her own soul, and in her fiction she describes the souls of her female and male protagonists. She describes the soul in such a way as to differentiate it from that which she clearly understood to be an individual's social construction. For example, in *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*, the way in which Elizabeth describes her response to a social invitation given to her, shows her differentiation between soul and construct: "Never, never, never, shrieked my soul. 'Oh thanks,' murmured my lips, 'how kind you are' " (E in R, 296). The voice of her social construct is agreeing to do something that her soul knows it will experience as unnourishing and infelicitous. The theorists discussed and quoted in this thesis are those who freely explore notions of the soul that both affirm and illuminate Elizabeth von Arnim's notions of soul.

Throughout her writing Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates how layers of social construction, cemented by the ideologies of patriarchal institutions make it difficult for people - especially women - to protect and nourish their souls. She shows how the needs and desires of the soul are often in conflict

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with, as well as threaten the economies and demands of institutional structures such as the law, education, religion and marriage.

The soul needs a protected space for imaginative reflection and where the cultivation of independent thought is possible: in other words, a felicitous space. In the garden, Elizabeth von Arnim could think, reflect, and distance herself from the oppressions and duties of the highly rigid and strict German culture that she had adopted through her marriage to Count Henning von Arnim. In observing the varying seasons of nature in conjunction with an active pleasure in literature, she perceived the garden as a metaphor of her life in terms of the development of her soul, and in this context, she believed herself to be in "the process of becoming".

The process of becoming is a concept of an evolving consciousness which is not possible for a woman who exists solely in male dominated space, where subjectivities are presumed to be fixed. To become is a process of becoming increasingly female-centred. The evolution of that consciousness begins when a woman can name her world and contrast spaces in which she feels liberated, (and therefore felicitous), with spaces in which she feels imprisoned (infelicitous). For the commencement of the process of becoming, Elizabeth von Arnim created a space that for her was felicitous. She became acutely conscious of the difference between a space that was felicitous and a space that was infelicitous through writing her Self into the text.

Mary Daly, in writing of the concept of soul, describes it as "an animating principle that is intimately united with the body" (Daly 1984, 344). The soul

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therefore, may be said to give life to the body, and the body to give life to the soul. In Elizabeth von Arnim's writing this applies, and the thesis will show how the application occurs. Hélène Cixous implores: "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous 1979, 245). Elizabeth von Arnim's movement to and from many places and contrasting spaces in her life, are reimagined in her text and form a trajectory of self revision. There is a strong sense in Helene Cixous's words of the need for women to be conscious of their own embodied agency in the writing process. Cixous believes that in a woman's act of writing her body is heard (Cixous 1979, 250), and in doing so she experiences "[an] emancipation of the marvellous text of her self" (Cixous 1979, 250). Elizabeth von Arnim was able to rename and validate her complete Self - through her own embodiment within the text itself. Consequently, she developed a continually expanding and unfolding understanding of who she was, as well as her desires, in the context of the two diverse realities of soul and social construct that she identified within her Self.

Through the writing of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim literally wrote a new Self into existence by calling herself Elizabeth: Elizabeth the Author, and Elizabeth, in both her public and private life. This renaming was significant for both her literary career as well as her personal quest for becoming. The writing process "becomes" her, and in doing so her life gives soul to her text and her text gives soul back to her life. Elizabeth von Arnim's process of renaming also extended to the infelicitous domain, and this will be shown to be significant in the process of her liberation. Elizabeth's writing created for her "a place—a space—where new

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borders between what can and cannot be said can find the time to form" (Jardine, 1981-2, 12). Her writings, are, in total, a renaming of many significant paths of her life.

Michel Foucault asks the following question: "What is an author's name and how does it function?" (Lodge 1988, 200). He surmises that "[t]he author's name serves to characterise a certain mode of being of discourse . . ." (Lodge 1988, 201). Elizabeth von Arnim's ironic voice in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* sets the mode of being of discourse for her other writings. As Wayne Booth perceives in *A Rhetoric of Irony*: "As soon as an ironic voice has been used to an extent in any work of any kind, readers inevitably begin to take interest and pleasure in that voice. . . . it can lead us on to work after work by the same author . . . just to get more of that *voice*" (Booth 1987, 176). This has been the experience of the writer of this thesis.

"That *voice*" comes through the various female subject positions which Elizabeth von Arnim used to describe the dual reality of women's lives, including her own. When I describe and theoretically explain the *voice* of a protagonist, such as Rose-Marie Schmidt, as ironic, it is in the interests of clarity and readability that I do not constantly acknowledge that it is actually Elizabeth von Arnim being ironic.

In describing her soul, Elizabeth von Arnim is making a distinction between her private self and her public, or social self. In her writing, she developed the style of a double narrative which created a contrast and tension

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between the two different realities; the separation of the two is maintained by ironic techniques and this facilitated the protection and maintenance of felicitous space in both her life and text.

In the seclusion of her garden, Elizabeth von Arnim was able to develop the distancing and relativity of the ironic stance. Her conventional surface descriptions of acquiring gardening knowledge through her horticultural successes and her failures are juxtaposed with a subtext suggesting a much wider subversive knowledge gained from her own experience in female-centred space, and then contrasting it with patriarchal space. Elizabeth von Arnim's irony is "a mode that springs from a recognition of the socially constructed self as arbitrary and that demands revision of values and conventions" (Walker 1990, 4). She combined irony and wit to defamiliarise the perception of being dominated and controlled, and in doing so changed that perception in a way that was empowering for her. This thesis aims to show Elizabeth von Arnim to be a mother of the contemporary ironic feminist novel, since she revealed these qualities in her writing at a time when female irony was mainly associated with Jane Austen.

However, Elizabeth von Arnim's irony differs from Jane Austen's irony in that the ironic contradictions created in Jane Austen's novels are finally resolved by an ultimate upholding of the institution of marriage.<sup>2</sup> There are no such endings in the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim. She maintains her ambivalence towards marriage throughout her writing. In both a light

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<sup>2</sup> In *Fictions of Romantic Irony*, Lilian Furst distinguishes between the traditional irony used by Jane Austen and romantic irony.



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and dark vein, she explores discrepancies, challenges assumptions but, unlike Jane Austen, leaves the reader with a deep sense of ambivalence and lack of resolution. There are no comfortable conclusions. Elizabeth von Arnim is a romantic ironist in so much as her world is one of openendedness, change, growth, ambivalence and relativism. As Lilian Furst states: "Romantic irony emanates from an open sense of self . . . which finds its aesthetic format in the eschewal of enclosure" (Furst, 1984, 232). Elizabeth von Arnim's way of perceiving the world finds a corresponding literary mode in irony. (Furst 1984, 226). This is a significant way in which her life animates with her text. As an ironist, Elizabeth von Arnim can stand apart from her Self and the culture that has constructed her.

Elizabeth von Arnim's use of irony displays a gender-specific resistance to oppression and a questioning of the fixity of the construction of gender. She would appear to be a forerunner of the increasing number of contemporary women writers who appropriate the device of irony to explore the conditions of women's lives. In her writing, Elizabeth von Arnim consistently reveals the vast ironic distance between fixed cultural prescriptions for women and a deeper reality centring upon their feelings and experience. She achieves this by deconstructing the myths, traditions, stories and images of her culture, and this results in an exposure of their mutability. Her irony often contains humour directed at the incongruity and absurdity of the dominant male culture. Like Jane Austen, Elizabeth von Arnim understood the power of language to subvert the control of authority. In this way, Elizabeth von Arnim led the ironic way for the contemporary woman novelist who now uses the device frequently as an intellectual and intuitive challenge to

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perceived reality.

This thesis aims to show how Elizabeth von Arnim both lived and wrote beyond the ending of what Rachel Brownstein has called “the marriage plot” (Brownstein 1982, xv), in which a woman’s quest is solely to become that which is validated by a man. Beyond this, the woman has no desire. Once the woman has been chosen by the man, the plot is concluded and the woman’s identity is also “finished” (DuPlessis 1985, xxi). In the course of the thesis, “the marriage plot,” “the romance plot,” and “the heterosexual love plot,”<sup>3</sup> are terms that will be used interchangeably, depending on the appropriate one for a particular context. Nancy A. Walker has shown how popular romance novels are unironic, in the sense that “they endorse rather than challenge cultural assumptions about women’s nature and aspirations” (Walker 1990, 5). Explaining this further, Chris Weedon says, “[m]uch of women’s writing, not least of all romance. . . . [Offers] women modes of femininity and of female desire which deny their own social construction, proclaiming themselves to be natural” (Weedon 1987, 170).

The writings of Elizabeth von Arnim that are examined in this thesis, may be read, to a greater or lesser degree, as subversions of the romance genre. Furthermore, in this context, they represent a variety of female subject positions, and through these positions Elizabeth von Arnim shows how oppression is exercised through the ideology of romantic love and its associated ideologies, as well as where and how, within her historic context,

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<sup>3</sup> In *Beyond the Ending*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis uses the terms “the romance plot” and “the heterosexual love plot” interchangeably.

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resistance is possible. Hélène Cixous states that “writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation” (Cixous 1979, 249). For Elizabeth von Arnim, writing fulfilled the possibility of personal change in her thought and life, resulting in an interanimation of her life with her text, and a dialectical transformative movement occurring between both as a result.

The thesis initially focuses on *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and draws upon its sequel, *The Solitary Summer*, as well as *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen* and *In the Mountains*. These four texts are all written in diary form and can be classified as loosely autobiographical since they do have imaginative and fictional elements. *The Solitary Summer* is similar in style, tone and form to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, and if *The Solitary Summer* is read in conjunction with *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, the interanimation of her life at this time with her text is more apparent. The thesis also considers three of Elizabeth von Arnim’s novels and ends with her last, and more conventional autobiographical work, *All the Dogs of My Life*, which was written towards the end of her life. Although not fundamental to this thesis, an earlier biography of Elizabeth von Arnim written by her eldest daughter, Liebet, under the pseudonym, Leslie de Charmes, and a later biography by Karen Usborne have confirmed my premise that there is an interanimation between Elizabeth von Arnim’s life and text. The titles of these biographies, *Elizabeth of the German Garden*, and ‘Elizabeth’: *The Author of Elizabeth and Her German Garden* are statements, in themselves, of an interanimation.

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In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim's pleasure in reading represents a significant dimension of her experience of felicitous space, and this is reflected in her other texts to be discussed in this thesis. She drew from a wide variety of sources including autobiographies, published diaries, and poetry to derive intellectual concepts and ideas, social issues, and imaginative inspiration for a conscious shaping of her world view, as well as her own pleasure. In her texts, she often speaks of her favourite male authors as if they were her daily companions, and this gives the reader a sense of her claiming equality with them - at times, even superiority - especially when she speaks affectionately and playfully about them, sometimes taking them off their high literary pedestals and revealing their idiosyncrasies.

Elizabeth von Arnim enjoyed glowing literary prestige in her own life time, yet mysteriously - unlike the male authors with whose writing she was so familiar - she disappeared textually, almost without trace after her death, as so many other prestigious women writers have done over the past centuries. It took a group of women publishers, more than forty years after Elizabeth von Arnim's death, to begin the process of uncovering her.<sup>4</sup>

Elizabeth von Arnim has been unjustly and inaccurately classified as a writer of romantic fiction. Dale Spender's research shows that, historically, once a work has been dismissed as such, "[l]ittle differentiation is made in relation to form, style or purpose" (Spender 1984, 152). This thesis aims to right this wrong and to make these differentiations.

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Spender uncovers a buried literary tradition of women writers in *Mothers of the Novel*.

## Elizabeth: The Interanimated Spaces

*Je suis l'espace où je suis.*—NOËL ARNAUD

*(I am the space where I am.)*

Elizabeth von Arnim's life contrasted with many other women of her time in that she utilized her life experiences in the development of her literary career. There were a number of important factors that were instrumental in this occurring. Her writing served two main purposes: firstly, it was a vital part of a life long quest for felicity, in conjunction with a desire to both develop and protect her independent identity. Secondly, financial independence, by means of her writing, became increasingly important to her with five children in an uncertain world of wars and widowhood.

Roland Barthes asserted that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (quoted in Lodge 1988, 172). However, in Elizabeth von Arnim's case, as I have premised in the introduction, her life and text do animate each other, to the extent that to ignore the Author and her life is actually to impose a limit on all her texts. To acknowledge the relevance of Elizabeth von Arnim's life in the context of its interanimation with her text, is to recognise her text as a multi-dimensional space, in which a wide variety of particular life circumstances are utilized and incorporated into the stream

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of her writings.

The interanimation of her life and text forms a trajectory of different, but related felicitous and infelicitous spaces. The geographical places of the trajectory extend from New Zealand to Australia to England, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France and America. The changes in her life - both to her soul and to her body - that are signified by these spaces and places, are manifested in her writing. With the accumulation of her life experiences and the transmutation of these into her writing, the trajectory that can be traced becomes more expansive, its shape fanning out into a broad space of open-endedness. This shape develops even further as Elizabeth's life experiences are gleaned and presented in her successive books.

The trajectory of the development of many women has historically, ceased upon marriage, when marriage is seen as the ultimate and legitimated personal success, conferring status that a personal female quest does not. In this way, marriage becomes a conscious conclusion to a woman's life. However, by contrast, Elizabeth von Arnim lived and wrote "beyond the ending,"<sup>1</sup> which means that she was marginal to the conventional terms of marriage in her life, and outside of the marriage plot in her text. The reasons for her doing so may be traced back to her life before marriage, when from the moment of her birth, she was geographically in a space of transition, and encouraged to cultivate a sense of discovery and interest in different places and cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel DuPlessis, in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, explains that any literary plot concerning women's self realisation or quest is, more often than not, subordinate to the heterosexual love plot.

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Elizabeth von Arnim's trajectory of self definition began on the west coast of New Zealand, near Paremata, where she was born - the youngest of six children - in the family's holiday home. Her father, a wealthy shipping merchant, was based in Sydney, Australia, and at the age of three years Elizabeth and her family moved to London. Much of Elizabeth's early education was unconventional as her father decided that his six children would be best educated by travelling. When Elizabeth was six years old, her parents rented a house in Lausanne, Switzerland surrounded by fields, trees and wild flowers. The family frequently explored the surrounding countryside and towns. Years later, Elizabeth, as a widow with new found freedom, chose to rekindle this felicitous space of childhood in Switzerland, by building her own house high in the alps. This location features in Elizabeth von Arnim's loosely autobiographical text, *In the Mountains*, and is a felicitous space in both an emotional and geographical sense. It links her life during widowhood, with her life before and after her second marriage.

In 1916, she married Francis, second Earl Russell, brother of Bertrand Russell. This proved to be the most infelicitous space of her life, and his oppression and infidelity caused Elizabeth to escape to America in the first year of their marriage. She returned to him, but in 1919 she once again had to escape from him using her wits and stealth. The novel, *In the Mountains*, does not specifically name the main cause of her devastation. In the text, she returns to a space of remembered felicity from a space of desperate infelicity. Out of this rediscovery of freedom and independence, she achieves sufficient ironic distance to write the novel, *Vera*, whose dark tone provided a marked contrast with the rest of her writing. *Vera*, in its entirety, provides an obvious example of Elizabeth's life as lived; her life as imagined, and her life

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as written.

When Elizabeth showed no desire for marriage at the age of twenty-four and began talking of an independent and self-sufficient life for herself in a country cottage, it was decided that she would tour Italy with her father to increase her marital prospects. The contradictions and tensions between quest and social convention that are evident in Elizabeth's writing interanimate with her own ambivalence towards marriage from early adulthood.

It was her accomplishments as a concert pianist and organist that attracted the attention of a German Count, Henning von Arnim, who was impressed when he heard her playing the organ at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. From this moment, Count von Arnim put considerable energy into courting her, and Elizabeth now experienced for herself the ideology and discourse of romance with its marriage plot that she would later subvert in her writing.

In the autobiographical text, *All the Dogs of My Life*, Elizabeth describes Count von Arnim proposing to her at the top of the Duomo in Florence and she records his use of the discourse of romantic love saying, "All girls like love. It is very agreeable. You will like it too. You shall marry me, and see." (D of L, 20). The Duomo symbolizes her imminent entrapment within the institution of marriage and within the German culture. Elizabeth's acceptance into the aristocracy to which Count von Arnim belonged was given the seal of approval by Cosima Wagner after she listened to Elizabeth give a piano recital in Bayreuth. Cosima was the daughter of Franz Liszt, the renowned Hungarian pianist, conductor and composer, and she was extremely influential in court and musical circles. The engagement gave



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Elizabeth von Arnim standing in her own family that she had never had, as the youngest child. She recalls, "Up to then I had been nobody, and suddenly I was . . . somebody" (D of L, 21). Her acceptance of the marriage plot as the "proper" path for her life was, none the less, ambivalent. Despite Elizabeth von Arnim's considerable musical talent, as well as her marriage to a member of the ruling class, she states, ironically, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* that in German law she was a "nobody" (EGG, 131). Her sole merit, in Germany, after marriage was the production of a son and heir.

After five years of married life in Berlin, Elizabeth von Arnim, her husband and three female children moved ninety miles north to the Count's eight thousand acre country estate called Nassenheide, in Pomerania, where she wrote *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. After its successful publication and eleven reprints in the first year, Elizabeth von Arnim had the means to be financially independent, but because she was married, all proceeds from the book were her husband's by German law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act of 1957. However, with the help of a female friend who visited Nassenheide, Elizabeth eventually persuaded her husband to sign a contract separating her estate from his in the marriage.

In 1901, after enthusiastically reading maps and guide books, Elizabeth von Arnim set off for Rügen, an island off Germany's Baltic coast. Accompanied by a female friend, it was an escape from the duties and oppressions of her life and an assertive act of independence. It lasted ten days. The ten days are chronicled in diary form in *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*. As she does in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, she introduces fictional characters and, as the speaking subject, she interacts with them.

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*The Enchanted April* recalls the circumstances and intentions of the *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*. Elizabeth von Arnim began writing *The Enchanted April* in the month of April, while she and two of her female friends were staying at an Italian castle surrounded by a beautiful garden overlooking the sea. In the novel, four women rent a similar castle and garden in Italy, in April, to escape from the men in their lives.

Elizabeth researched unconventionally for writing the novel, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*. Telling no-one but her husband, (who by this time, presumably, was enjoying the fruits of Elizabeth's literary career) she advertised herself as an English governess, a "Miss Armstrong," who worked in the von Arnim household and wished to improve her German during the Easter holidays. The understanding was that Miss Armstrong would assist the professor's wife domestically in exchange for lessons from her husband. Elizabeth von Arnim's intention was to gain an understanding of the class and lifestyle - vastly different to her own - of her female protagonist, Rose-Marie Schmidt, the daughter of an impoverished professor. For this purpose, Elizabeth travelled to the university town of Jena and located her story there. Here is an example of a direct intention of Elizabeth von Arnim to write imaginatively, out of a predetermined, stage-managed life experience.

Elizabeth von Arnim's life as lived, imagined and written, was not as predetermined for her novel, *The Caravaners*. Like the women in *The Enchanted April* who were stirred by an imaginative advertisement in "The Times," Elizabeth von Arnim was also stirred by an advertisement in "The Times" for caravans and horses. Disregarding the conventions of her class, once again, she actually travelled like a gypsy in the south of England with her daughters, two female friends and two men, one of whom was E.M.

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Forster who had tutored her children at Nassenheide. It was intended to be an experience of sun-filled felicitous space, but turned out to be the wettest August on record, and this weather pattern was incorporated into the novel.

English women at this time enjoyed greater freedom than German women. In *The Caravaners*, Edelgard, the female protagonist in *The Caravaners*, sheds her Germanic construct while on holiday with her husband, the pompous, sexist, racist Baron von Ottringe. Edelgard's transformation recalls the transformation of Elizabeth von Arnim in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, as well as the four women in *The Enchanted April*. Edelgard's change of consciousness is in "the Garden of England" (C's, 37), where she "developed a sudden eloquence in regard to natural phenomena such as moons and poppies" (C's, 18).

Elizabeth escaped to England from time to time when the pressure of producing a male heir in Germany became too great, and like Edelgard, could, to an extent, shed her German construction there. German women were denied any form of pain relief in childbirth. After four daughters, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. It was not until after the death of her husband that she published *The Pastor's Wife*. In it, the female protagonist is a young English woman named Ingeborg, who is oppressed by a life which revolves around her father, an English bishop. She marries a German pastor thinking she will escape her duties and oppression in England by living in the distant, forested spaciousness of East Prussia, only to find that she has exchanged one prison for another. Elizabeth von Arnim wrote of the grim realities of childbirth for Ingeborg in Germany, at a time when few women writers, even with the protection of fiction, named their experience of childbirth in contradiction to

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legitimated patriarchal meanings of motherhood.<sup>2</sup>

Like Elizabeth von Arnim, Ingeborg, in *The Pastor's Wife*, had no realistic preparation for motherhood and she is increasingly worn down by childbearing and the absence of space in between for her Self, to the point where pregnancy and childbirth come to represent death for her instead of life. As Dale Spender says, such meanings have been without authority or validity because they were not the legitimated ones (Spender 1992, 55-56). Through the character of Ingeborg, Elizabeth von Arnim describes the contradictions and extreme tensions that she herself experienced between her society's legitimated meaning for motherhood and her own.

Fay Weldon, in an essay entitled "Me And My Shadows," admits to "[encountering] the frustrations, the helplessness, the feelings of compromise and desperation which are in my characters. I don't call them autobiographical but I do believe that I am all of them to some degree" (Weldon 1983, 164). Weldon's observations have relevance for an analysis of Elizabeth von Arnim's writings in terms of the claim of this thesis: that Elizabeth von Arnim's life and text interanimate. This thesis will continue to show, in more detail, that the range of female subject positions in Elizabeth von Arnim's writing are a range of the subject positions that she experienced in her life, as a subject in process.

This chapter has presented a selection of some of the range of interanimating spaces of Elizabeth von Arnim's life and text. As Virginia Woolf stated: texts "are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures . . ."

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Spender, in *Mothers of the Novel*, addresses the silence in women's fiction relating to their illegitimated fears and experiences of childbirth (262).

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(quoted in Cornillon 1972, 326), and this principle is particularly applicable to Elizabeth von Arnim's writings. Furthermore, her texts formed an important heuristic device for her process of becoming, in conjunction with her life long quest for felicity. The effect of this was the creation of an expanding trajectory from her birth to her death; a trajectory that was fuelled by marriage rather than doused by marriage.

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*My soul into the boughs does glide:  
There like a bird it sits and sings,  
Then whets and combs its silver wings  
And till prepared for longer flights,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.*

*Such was that happy garden state. . . .  
Two paradises 'twere in one  
To live in paradise alone.—ANDREW MARVELL*

*Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was the first published writing of Elizabeth von Arnim and is loosely autobiographical, despite being described as “a novel” and “a pastoral idyll” in the introduction to the most recent publication of the text (Elizabeth Jane Howard 1985, viii). The introduction’s description denies the latent layers of signification built into the text that centres upon Elizabeth von Arnim’s personal and illegitimated quest for felicity. This thesis shows how her quest is thwarted by a number of patriarchal conventions including the marriage plot. However, she ironically deconstructs the patriarchal power relationships in the interests of the creation, protection, and maintenance of female-centred space.

*Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was significant in terms of Elizabeth von Arnim’s literary career because she broke through the barriers and censorship imposed upon women writers of the German *Junker* class. It was considered unseemly for the German upper class to write for financial gain. She overcame this by using the English publisher, Macmillan. Her husband

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censored the first draft of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Consequently, it seems that she crafted it not only for the publishers, but for his final approval, and in doing so she wrote a double narrative. The double narrative reflects the division between her private and public self, and this technique involves the use of ironic subterfuge which pervades her successive writings. Elizabeth von Arnim was part of a female literary tradition that utilized the patriarchal public domain in terms of accepting the censorship and editing of male publishers, yet still managed to tell her story in an encoded and therefore subversive narrative. Women's writing, particularly female-centred writing, had to accommodate the tensions between the dichotomies of the private and public sphere.

Count Henning von Arnim insisted that his wife publish *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* anonymously. Elizabeth von Arnim's name at birth was Mary Annette Beauchamp. She was called May by her family at the time of her marriage and prior to the publication of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. After its publication, Countess May von Arnim, aged thirty-two years, renamed herself Elizabeth, and eventually became known to readers, family, and friends as Elizabeth. All successive books she wrote, even after her husband's death were "By the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*" or simply "By Elizabeth". Elizabeth von Arnim and "the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*" became one and the same. This literal renaming had significant implications for her literary career. Elizabeth von Arnim was able to establish both the authorship as well the autobiographical genre of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. It also represented an intertextual relationship between *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and her other writings.

The renaming also had implications for Elizabeth von Arnim's sense of Self because it signified the development of a new identity without compromise. In complying with her husband's demand that she publish anonymously, she could have used a male pseudonym, as many women writers have done, in order to ensure publication as well as the privileged status of a male author. However, the anonymity that she initially accepted was part of the process of transformation between Countess May von Arnim, as owned by her husband in marriage, and Elizabeth, as an independent being, whose name related solely to herself rather than any man. This particular renaming avoided taking on either her father or her husband's name and therefore transcended the signification of patriarchal titles. *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* became, for Elizabeth, her way to create a written Self - Elizabeth - who wrote her Self into existence.<sup>1</sup> This gave her the freedom to develop a new consciousness within a female-centred space.

The central metaphor of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* is that of the garden as it symbolizes Elizabeth von Arnim's soul in the process of becoming. The analogy of the garden is used to contrast a dialectic of indoor and outdoor space that translates into the difference between felicitous and infelicitous space for Elizabeth's soul. Her love of books contributed to the enhancement of her felicitous space and stimulated her imaginative writing.

Prior to the writing of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim had spent the first five years of marriage enduring life in Berlin. She initially struggled with the German language and especially with her duty of giving orders to servants. The German Empire was newly united and

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<sup>1</sup> The French writer, Colette, renamed herself in a similar way, and this is described by Mari McCarty in "Possessing female space: 'The Tender Shoot' " (368).



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consequently, Elizabeth von Arnim personally experienced the xenophobia evident in those years. She felt the alienation of being Other on this level, as well as in her personal life where her husband made it clear she was now German, and his property.

While suffering home sickness and morning sickness with her first child, Elizabeth von Arnim's request to give birth in England was refused by her husband on the grounds that it was unpatriotic. Her feelings were also not legitimised by German female acquaintances who talked of the privilege of producing German sons for the Fatherland. The pain of childbearing was considered by German doctors to be both natural and necessary. She asked for pain relief and was refused. A breast infection with an associated high fever followed. It was a soul-destroying experience for Elizabeth von Arnim that led to post-natal depression. She was once again forced to give birth to her second baby in Germany. With her third, however, she insisted on going to England where her brother, Sydney Beauchamp, who was gynaecologist to Queen Victoria, delivered the baby with sensitivity towards Elizabeth. Queen Victoria had, through her own experience of chloroform during childbirth, made its use acceptable for women in England.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth, as the speaking subject, states her belief that a garden is never finished (EGG, 57). She believes it be continually in process as she also believes her soul to be. For Elizabeth, the concept of being "finished" is synonymous with marriage and death. Continual complicated pregnancies and childbearing nearly "finished" Elizabeth von Arnim, physically and psychologically, and in *All the Dogs of My Life*, she associates childbearing with "dark forebodings and the tendency to make Wills" (D of L, 42). These are expressions of finality and profound

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infelicitous space. She describes eventually being able to “crawl [outdoors] into freedom” (D of L, 42). The cost to her body and soul of continual childbearing is not acknowledged directly in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, but rather hinted at through the double narrative, in which she names her first three children “the April, June and May babies” (EGG, 27), as if they belonged to a happy nursery rhyme. The subtext is detected in the successive months of April, May, and June, as these signify successive childbearing - with no space in between for her Self.

This subtext is possibly due to the probable censorship by her husband of such illegitimated experience which was considered to be unnatural. Written after his death, Elizabeth von Arnim's novel, *The Pastor's Wife*, gave her greater space, freedom, and protection from censorship to reveal a generally silenced experience of motherhood which conflicted with man-made legitimated meanings of motherhood. These meanings involved the belief in its complete fulfilment and happiness for a woman as a complement to the marriage plot. Yet Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates how both sexes perpetrate the myths of motherhood by their unquestioning acceptance of the ideology that forms them.

In this way, Elizabeth von Arnim developed the thematic concerns introduced in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* through her fiction, but with less codification, a darker tone at times, and sharper ironic analysis. When the body of Elizabeth von Arnim's autobiographical and fictional writing is read intertextually, the encoding becomes clearer and easier to decipher. Furthermore the way in which her life animates the text, and conversely, how the text also animates her life, becomes more obvious.

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In her marriage to Count Henning von Arnim, Elizabeth von Arnim found herself trapped in the highly structured, elaborate codes of behaviour, ritual and rigid protocol of Prussian *Junker* society. Biographer, Karen Usborne notes that the von Arnims were intimates of the circle immediately surrounding the Imperial family and were therefore expected to make and receive calls, to attend parties and give them, and to appear for receptions at embassies. Elizabeth von Arnim spent a great deal of time searching for the right gloves, feathers and ribbons. She even took instruction from women courtiers on traditional, highly complex etiquette and eventually carried it out to perfection. However, she bitterly lamented in her private diary: "One feels more alone in Berlin than anywhere in the world, I think" (quoted in Usborne 1986, 43). Elizabeth von Arnim found no pleasure in, or relief from the soul-less-ness of Prussian society which was a society based on strict adherence to the codes of male-centred space.

However, the first sighting of the garden at Nassenheide on her husband's Pomeranian estate, in 1896, was to change Elizabeth von Arnim's life both privately and publicly. It would provide a means of space and solitude that she had not experienced since the happy, carefree days of her childhood when her father was absent for months at a time. She recalls that,

the minute he was gone, relaxation set in. Queer how sprightly life became, how roomy, with what wide margins, when my father, in those years, wasn't there. For my part, instead of taut I became happy-go-lucky; instead of minding my p's and q's and watching my steps, I ceased to mind or watch anything.  
(D of L, 10)

In this passage from *All the Dogs of My Life*, Elizabeth von Arnim reflects on her first experience of female-centred felicitous space, the memory of which

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ensured a yearning to recreate it over and over in her life and text. The wide margins that Elizabeth von Arnim experienced in her garden nourished her soul, and, at the same time, nourished her creative life as a writer. Consequently, the garden, in effect, became the source of a flourishing literary career.

She eventually persuaded her husband that the family should live at Nassenheide. The imposing seventeenth century *schloss* had been unoccupied for twenty-five years. Around it lay a vast space that she describes in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* as “less a garden than a wilderness” (EGG, 2). Its soulfulness was a striking and immediate contrast to the soulless-ness of her life in Berlin. Elizabeth von Arnim’s first sighting of this wilderness reads as an epiphany. She recalls the moment as “the beginning of her real life” (EGG, 8). It is a moment when she profoundly engages with her soul, as she recognises the garden as a potential source of empowerment. Her language expresses this empowerment when she speaks of her “coming of age and entering into [her] kingdom” (EGG, 8). Mary Daly remarks that “when women take positive steps to move out of patriarchal space and time, there is a surge of new life” (Daly 1985, 43).

Elizabeth von Arnim wonders, looking back, what it was about the garden that made her feel this way. Thomas Moore writes of “the soil of wondering and questioning” (Moore 1992, 253) in connection with the soul’s flourishing. Elizabeth’s soul is enlivened by a variety of sensory perceptions, and she wonders if it was the smell of wet earth or rotting leaves that brought back felicitous memories of childhood days spent in a garden (EGG, 8). Her questioning is concerned with relatedness, as “the soul is attracted to that which stirs the imagination” (Moore 1992, 279). It is significant that the

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particular childhood days she remembers, spent on “a lawn closely strewn with dandelions and daisies” (EGG, 9) are before the constructiveness of her formal education. Elizabeth experiences “a spatial freedom - that makes possible a sensuous perception so acute that a sound or a smell carries the mind and the body vast distances in time and space” (Fryer 1986, 290). In this instance, she experiences the expansive dimensions of space and time associated with the life of the soul.

Clearly, Elizabeth is identifying with, and longing to return to that part of herself she recognises has been lost through conforming to the infelicitous expectations of a complex, male dominated culture. The image of dandelions and daisies is one of pleasure and child-like simplicity, providing a marked contrast to her five infelicitous years in Berlin. The image of those years “falling from [her] like a cloak” (EGG, 8) represents a desire to shed the heavy constricting layers of her social construction.

Elizabeth von Arnim’s recognition of her social construction is evident throughout *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. On the first page she describes listening to a male and female owl singing in the garden. The female answers the male song, “beautifully assenting to and completing her lord’s remark, as becomes a properly constructed German she-owl.” (EGG, 1). It is interesting that Elizabeth von Arnim uses the word “constructed” in 1898, given its prominence in contemporary literary theory. The German she-owl reflects the properly constructed German woman that she, Elizabeth, is expected by her husband and his culture to be at all times. She realises the damage this has wrought in her soul. When Elizabeth states that her husband is “welcomed [home] by a wife wreathed in the orthodox smiles”

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(EGG, 30), she reveals her recognition of compliance with her construction as a woman and particularly as “a wife.” In their book, *Reflecting Men at Twice Their Natural Size*, Sally Cline and Dale Spender cite research revealing that smiling “is an essential part of the elaborate ritual of reflection in which women are forced to dissemble” (Cline & Spender 1987, 98). Elizabeth is well aware of how this daily, mandatory smile is a constant symbol of acquiescing in her own oppression.

Even in her garden Elizabeth von Arnim is not entirely free from the social constructs of gender. For instance, one of the contradictions and tensions for her despite having a garden “all [her] own” (EGG, 25), is that she is unable to dig or plant according to the *Junker* code of behaviour. This deeply frustrates her, especially when few of her successive gardeners can carry out her vision for the garden. However, she expresses her delight at surreptitiously digging, one Sunday afternoon, when there is no-one around outside. She describes running back indoors, feeling very hot and guilty, and sitting in a chair trying to look languid as her gender construct dictated. Elizabeth’s “guilt” contradicts her “trying” to look languid, and the effect is ironic (EGG, 25). One gardener eventually became psychologically disturbed and began carrying a pistol in one hand and a spade in the other. Another acquires an eye disease. The ill-health of these constructed German men reflects the incongruity of their presence in this female-centred space.

In Berlin, strict observance of the construct of femininity<sup>2</sup> took precedence over the care of her soul. In *The Solitary Summer*, the sequel to

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<sup>2</sup> The construct of femininity is an aspect of the more general theoretical term used in this thesis, “social construction,” and refers to the roles, images, and values that are imposed specifically upon women by systems of representation devised by patriarchy to maintain dominance and control over women.

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*Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth equates an empty soul with an all-consuming passion for hats (SS, 30). In the garden, away from human gaze she can discard her hat. Fashion served to underline the elaborate rituals of her urban *Junker* existence and as well as those indoors at Nassenheide, where an appropriate costume for every activity and every hour of the day or evening was obligatory in terms of correctly reflecting her class and status. Elizabeth prefers buying rose-trees to new dresses and anticipates a time when her passion for the garden will take such a hold on her that she will not only cease buying more clothes, but begin to sell those that she already has (EGG, 154). Her deconstruction of these rigid social codes of feminine behaviour shows her realization of their detrimental effects on her soul.

Although now free of Berlin, indoors at Nassenheide represents duties, responsibilities, and rituals for Elizabeth von Arnim that are in conflict with the desires of her soul and are, therefore, deeply infelicitous. Indoors she feels alienated from herself and others. Indoors she feels exposed and vulnerable to those who demand that she fulfil her onerous social obligations. She says the garden is the place she goes to for shelter, not the house (EGG, 33). Her existence indoors is structured, formal and repetitious. For instance, every morning, one of her duties is to unlock the sausage-room with her heavy bunch of keys and portion out sausages to the household. She describes the effect this has on her soul:

My horizon is bounded by them [sausages], every faculty is absorbed by them. . . . I am practically dead to every other consideration in heaven or on earth. What are they to me, Love, Life, Death, all the mysteries? . . . If I were to spend my days in their entirety doing such work I should never have time to think, and if I never thought I should never feel, and if I never felt I should never suffer or rapturously enjoy, and so I

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should grow to be something very like a sausage myself, and not on that account, I do believe, any the less precious to [her husband], the Man of Wrath.  
(SS, 74)

Here she uses the analogy of meat to convey a sense of the “deadening” effect that the performance of this example of an indoor duty has on the sensibilities of her soul. Meat also pervades almost every formal meal in the dining room at Nassenheide.

The rituals of these meals are experienced as an oppression by Elizabeth von Arnim to the extent that she repeats and elaborates on the description in each of her autobiographical works. The felicity she experiences in the garden disappears when “oppressed by the necessity of assisting at three dining-room meals daily, two of which are conducted by the functionaries held indispensable to a proper maintenance of the family dignity . . .” (EGG, 11). The children’s tutors are present and “nothing was ever said or discussed, much less burst out, at those meals, that had anything to do with anybody’s private feelings” (D of L, 47). In *The Solitary Summer* she describes having to reluctantly come indoors from the garden and “live through those dreary luncheon-ridden hours when the soul is crushed out of sight and sense . . .” (SS, 16). As Luce Irigaray says, “repetition without progression is wearisome, exhausting, and damaging” (Irigaray, 1993, 114). Irigaray is speaking within the context of women needing to live in organic time which celebrates the seasons of a woman’s life and her process of becoming, rather than linear time which looks “at an accumulation of years and decay” and calls it the aging process (Irigaray, 1993, 113). For some people, patriarchal rituals appeal and provide a sense of security, but for Elizabeth von Arnim they were a controlling mechanism from which she longed to escape.



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The German cultural celebration of birthdays is one such ritual. There is one female friend of Elizabeth's who lives a considerable distance from Nassenheide and who comes to stay during the latter half of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Elizabeth describes how the two of them have, over the years, conspired to subvert the sentimental and ritualistic cultural tradition of German birthdays. She says "in defiance of tradition, [we] scorn this celebration of birthday rites" (EGG, 175). Year after year, she confides, they exchange the first birthday presents they ever gave each other - a notebook and a brass candlestick. Elizabeth explains that:

Since then we alternately enjoy the possession of each of these articles . . . at a minimum of trouble and expense. We never mention this little arrangement except at the proper time, when we send a letter of fervid thanks.  
(EGG, 176)

Elizabeth reveals how sites of resistance to the dominant culture need not be visibly revolutionary to be empowering. She shows how resistance can be creative, playful, and satisfyingly ironic; how every seemingly small resistant stance and refusal builds empowerment for a woman's sense of Self, and consequently opens up more female-centred space for her. Elizabeth cannot fully throw off all the expectations of her social construction as she lives, but as she writes, she is able to pit herself against patriarchy and its institutions, showing their absurdities through the use of humour and irony.

As has been shown, indoors represents a sense of closure for Elizabeth von Arnim's soul. Indoors there is a husband, children, servants and furniture. In this space she feels alienated from her body and trapped in it, whereas outdoors, she experiences the connection of her body and soul.

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Scenes of Elizabeth outdoors in her garden are contrasted with scenes indoors. The latter often involve dialogue between Elizabeth, her husband and friends where the constructs that she is wanting to escape from are aired, debated and reinforced. In one such dialogue, Elizabeth and her two female guests reveal how German law is both discriminatory and arbitrary. After doing so, Elizabeth continues to give further detail in this context, thereby showing the necessity for women to create female-centred space. For instance, she states that the law forbids the attendance of "women, children and idiots" (EGG, 136), at political meetings. Her husband thinks this is "a very proper classification . . ." (EGG, 137). Using paradox and irony, Elizabeth von Arnim also renders the restriction of space available to women absurd in the following passage of dialogue:

"Did you know that the law forbids females of any age to ride on the top of omnibuses or tramcars?"

"Not really?"

"Do you know why?"

"I can't imagine."

"Because in going up and down the stairs those inside might perhaps catch a glimpse of the stocking covering their ankles."

"But what—"

"Did you know that the morals of the German public are in such a shaky condition that a glimpse of that sort would be fatal to them?"

"But I don't see how a stocking—"

"With stripes round it," said Irais.

"And darns in it," I added.

"—could possibly be pernicious?"

(EGG, 136-137)

In this passage, Elizabeth von Arnim exposes one example of the absurdity of German law, and highlights the paradox of the German public - in reality, men - who are the law makers, focusing on something as innocuous as a

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woman's ankle in order to maintain power over the already powerless.

Elizabeth reveals the qualities of her soul to her Self and the reader by contrasting her own desires and needs to those of others in her autobiographical writings. Talking to a group of women at a dinner party in the nearest town, she finds it impossible to convince them that she is happy living in the isolation of the countryside. In their constructedness, they fail to recognise and accept her reality of difference and all are of the opinion that solitude is unhealthy. "How could I talk to them of the happiness I felt when the sun shone on the snow, or of the deep delight of hoar-frost days?" (EGG, 38), Elizabeth says, choosing not to describe her pleasure in order to protect her soul from potential misunderstanding that crushes, or at worst batters her sense of Self.

There are other ways in which she refuses to comply with the cultural expectations of women imposed by both women and men. For instance, she classifies "all forms of needlework of the fancy order [as] inventions of the evil one for keeping the foolish from applying their hearts to wisdom" (EGG, 6). Needlework was traditionally an activity that women performed indoors in a drawing room, however, Elizabeth prefers to be outdoors. Furthermore, the passage is encoded, since she is implying that needlework is a distraction encouraged by patriarchy ("the evil one"), to prevent women ("the foolish"), from naming their world and creating an alternative female-centred space.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim describes creating an alternative space for herself during the time when she spent six weeks alone at Nassenheide before her husband and family arrived to live there permanently. She came to fulfil the duty of supervision of renovations,

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but she managed to spend her time predominantly outdoors rather than indoors. She took her mainly vegetarian meals outdoors. She says, "My days seemed to melt away in a dream of pink and purple peace" (EGG, 10). These colours symbolize a female-centred space and suggest a rare time for Elizabeth when there were no expectations placed upon her that conflicted with her soul. The poetic image of "the pink and purple peace" strongly contrasts with her description of the day when her husband visited:

Then he appeared suddenly who has a right to appear when  
and how he will and rebuked me for never having written,  
and when I told him that I had been literally too happy to  
think of writing he seemed to take it as a reflection on himself  
that I could be happy alone.  
(EGG, 15)

The absence of punctuation throughout this lengthy sentence symbolizes the lack of pauses -lack of space - for Elizabeth as soon as her husband arrived. The syntactical construction of the first two lines is a parody of biblical narrative, used by Elizabeth von Arnim to enhance the dramatic effect of the perjorative naming of her husband as the Man of Wrath. The name is synonymous with the revengeful god of the Old Testament who stood, all powerful, all knowing, in judgement. Elizabeth's husband considers his role in the marriage to involve keeping his wife firmly rooted in the patriarchal space. He talks to her patronisingly, as if she were a wayward child, reminding her of her duty and accusing her of selfishness for taking pleasure in her solitude without himself or the rest of the family present. He expects Elizabeth's happiness to reside solely in relationship to others - predominantly himself - and not in relationship to her Self.

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Elizabeth, by way of response, playfully takes him around the garden along the new paths she had made, but he refuses to appreciate her creativity in her newly claimed female-centred space. He could only criticise the lilacs's lack of pruning. These new garden paths represent a sense of open-endedness and possibilities for her life in the future, instead of the symbolic closure of the one, narrow, patriarchal path of marriage and maternity. As Luce Irigaray says, the mother is also a woman, a subject, with a life, sex and desires of her own and cannot be entirely consumed in, or by maternity. Irigaray defines the excess or remainder left over to be the mother's specificity as a woman (explained in Grosz 1989, 179). Elizabeth's newly created paths with plants freely spilling out and trailing along them, are analogous with the new imaginative paths that she, as a woman, is deliberately cultivating in her soul, and using to animate the developmental process of her writing. The soul does not like to be constricted by the reason and logic of one straight linear path. It likes, as Thomas Moore puts it, to go "meandering and awandering" (Moore, 1992, 260).

After the return of her husband to Berlin, Elizabeth tells the reader that she did her duty to her husband and family, as best she could, from a distance. She speaks in a dual narrative: The conventional public voice "was disturbed by twinges of conscience" to which she says she is much subject (EGG, 16), but the private voice "could not manage to fret and yearn" (EGG, 16). The private voice - situated in her female-centred space - continues in playful rhetoric: "What are you to do if your conscience is clear and your liver in order and the sun is shining?" (EGG, 16).

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The construct of virtue, illustrated in the previous quotation by Elizabeth von Arnim's public voice, illegitimises a woman's pleasure generally and, more specifically, her pleasure in her own Self. Virtue and duty have, historically, been synonymous for women, and Elizabeth escapes to the garden to free herself from both. As Marilyn French states: "'Virtue' involves the renunciation of pleasure in the name of some higher purpose, a purpose which involves power (for men) or sacrifice (for women)" (French 1985, 587). Like Elizabeth von Arnim, Marilyn French believes that pleasure has been maligned as something that is indulgent and shallow when, in reality, it is intrinsic to survival. A woman's virtue, in a religious context, has meant obedience to her heavenly "lord" and his earthly representatives and, in effect, her deferral of personal pleasure for the promise of eternal felicity in a nebulous after-life.

The irony of the title, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, is that Elizabeth's garden is far from being a typical German garden. She describes such a garden as,

concentrating all the available splendour of the establishment into the supreme effort of carpet-bedding and glass balls on pedestals in front of the house, in the hope that the stranger, carefully kept in that part, and on no account allowed to wander, will infer an equal magnificence throughout the entire domain; whereas [she] knows very well all the time that the landscape round the corner consists of fowls and dust bins.  
(SS, 144)

This is a very formal and controlled garden, maintained to impress, and is therefore the antithesis of Elizabeth's garden with its appearance of unconstructedness and its purpose of providing a personal space for reflection. Elizabeth thinks a garden "should be beautiful from end to end"

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(SS, 141). She creates this effect in the garden at Nassenheide, according to Elizabeth Jane Howard in her introduction to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, "with an apparent carelessness that was none the less artful" (EGG, xi). Elizabeth desires her garden to look unconstructed, choosing complicity with nature rather than domination over it. Her garden was certainly not modelled on English gardens of the time which, to her, were "so immaculate that the diseased imagination conjures up visions of housemaids issuing forth each morning . . . and dusting every separate flower with feather brushes" (SS, 150). She likes to plant flowers in groups to achieve a "natural effect" (EGG, 24). Elizabeth's aspirations for her garden symbolically parallel the aspirations she perceives as necessary for her soul space.

Although like Edith Wharton, Elizabeth von Arnim wrote in her garden, it was not her intention to create *il giardino segreto* - the garden room - of Wharton's which was an exterior space with the appearance of an interior, domestic space (Wharton 1976, 30). Elizabeth purposefully and artfully shaped her garden to escape from anything resembling a constructed room, as well the oppressions she associated with interiors. After experiencing the spaciousness and freedom of her garden with its many meandering paths, copses, fields, heath and forests beyond, she feels "choked, oppressed, suffocated in anything small and perfect" (SS, 150). Edith Wharton's garden room would, for Elizabeth von Arnim, have represented an attempt to incorporate female-centred space within the dominant male-centred space, and this would have been a contradiction in terms.

For twenty-five years the garden at Nassenheide had not been shaped or controlled by human hand, but rather by the regenerative forces of nature. The interference of "civilising" forces that Elizabeth has experienced and now

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acknowledges, is synonymous with the effect of a controlled, formal garden display. She refuses to surround the garden with wire-netting despite the ravages of hares, squirrels and foxes. Many weeds are intentionally allowed to flourish (SS,152-3). Elizabeth sees an image of her soul and its growth when she looks at the natural wilderness of the garden with its excess of variety and delicate web of interrelatedness. It is in its wilderness state that she first loves it because it speaks synonymously to her of the possibility of developing a wilderness space within herself which can be protected and nurtured: a space that is symbolic of that fragile inner part of her psyche that she calls her soul.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés's describes the female soul as "the place of the wildish self" (Estés 1993, 10). Elizabeth recognises and names her wildish self. For example, in *The Solitary Summer*, she asks: "Who shall follow the dark intricacies of the *elemental* female mind?" (SS, 30, emphasis added). The place of the wildish self within the female psyche represents the antithesis of Elizabeth's social construction. She knows her soul needs the environment that the felicitous space of the garden is for her. She realises the immediate desire she has to nourish her soul. Through the image of the garden, Elizabeth has found a form that reflects back to her the qualities she desires her soul to acquire: the quality of flux rather than stagnation, of variety rather than sameness, of excess rather than lack. Consequently, the form of the garden with its seasonal cycles of death, renewal and growth reflects the tranforming processes that she desires her soul to experience in the process of becoming.



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The diary form of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *The Solitary Summer* and *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen* supports Elizabeth's process of becoming, and shows, consequently, how her literary career and her personal career interanimate with each other. Each enhance and give soul to the other. The diary form encouraged her uninhibited, spontaneous self expression of her "real and natural self" (SS, 149), because she could name her world which ultimately illuminated the threat her gendered social construction posed to her female soul and her female-centred space. The periodic time scheme of the diary form makes the contrast between felicitous and infelicitous space immediate and fervent. For example:

June 16th.—Yesterday morning I got up at three o'clock and stole through the echoing passages and strange dark rooms, undid with trembling hands the bolts of the door to the verandah, and passed out into a wonderful, unknown world. . . . I went down the path leading to the stream on the east side of the garden brushing aside rockets that were bending across it. . . . I sat down on the twisted, half-fallen trunk of a birch and waited, my feet in the long grass and my slippers soaking in dew. . . . Through the trees I could see the house with its closed shutters and drawn blinds, the people in it all missing, as I have missed day after day, the beauty of life at that hour. . . . One associates daylight with people, and voices and bustle, and hurrys to and fro, and the dreariness of working to feed our bodies, and feeding our bodies that we may be able to work to feed them again; but here was the world wide awake and yet only for me, all the fresh pure air only for me, all the fragrance breathed only by me, not a living soul hearing the nightingale but me.

(SS, 57-59)

Here she contrasts two different worlds: her world in the garden rediscovered afresh at three o'clock in the morning, unknown to all but herself, where the desires of her soul for quality of life involving beauty and

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pleasure can be satisfied. The Other world - the constructed world - of the house with its closed shutters, bolted doors, and its enclosed interior is designed for duty not pleasure. Inside represents hierarchies and linear time.

It is significant that the diary form is analogous with the open-endedness of the garden. As Lorna Martens says of the diary form of writing, "it does not seem to impose distorting structures on . . . experience. It has no end: Consequently it is never 'finished' either as a text or as a work of art" (Martens 1985, 187). The diary form is centred upon the present. It is a narrative of built-in spaces and "a sequence of . . . present moments" (Martens 1985, 188). The loose style of the diary form is synonymous with the wilderness effect of Elizabeth's garden which can be fully appreciated in the way she relates her experience of "June 16" in the passage (SS, 57-59), quoted previously. The implication of her process in experimenting with these analogous forms - the literary form and the garden form - is that Elizabeth opens up more space for her Self in which her experience is validated, celebrated, and built on, because she names her world and on reflection this leads her to understand that she is moving between two distinct realities.

For instance, she defies the instruction of a German gardening book that relegates all tea roses to hot-houses. She plants them in the garden under fir branches and leaves and they all survive a northern winter. In her style of experimental and experiential gardening, and in the writing of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* in diary mode, she has found two forms that do not impose distorting structures on her experience. In this way, her personal and literary space complement and enhance each other as they validate her confidence in thinking independently. Furthermore, the process of diary writing has enabled her to translate the symbolism of the garden into her

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writing.

Historically, the subjective narrative of the diary form has been prominent in women's writing. Lorna Martens suggests that "[d]iary keeping is the modern form of the Catholic confessional and Protestant self-scrutiny" (Martens 1985, 173). Elizabeth von Arnim subverts this self-depreciating form by her determined affection for herself,<sup>3</sup> throughout *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. When Elizabeth's husband condemns her for her obvious enjoyment of solitude before the family join her to live at Nassenheide, her confession is not aligned with the construct of German motherhood.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* there is only one space indoors at Nassenheide in which Elizabeth feels at home. It is the library, which she says is not used by her husband. This is "neutral ground" (EGG, 86) for her in relation to him, and is connected to the garden by means of four windows opening out onto her most cherished area of garden. It faces the south and, true to the symbolism of felicitous space in Elizabeth von Arnim's other texts, the library is flooded with sunlight. Elizabeth has decorated the library in colours of white and yellow that light up the room in a way she describes "as to be almost frivolous" (EGG, 86) to others, but a pleasurable space for herself.

The library reflects Elizabeth's felicity in books. Around the walls are many books she loves, but in the centre of the room are all the books she "loves the best" (SS, 31) and rereads on a regular basis. Reflecting the growth and process of her soul, she says that her favourite books change from time to time as she gets older; some around the walls change places with those in the

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<sup>3</sup> The implications of self-depreciation are addressed within the context of the romance plot in the chapters concerning *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*.

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middle. Those books that no longer bring Elizabeth felicity or reflect her evolving consciousness are placed on shelves in the drawing room - a space where she must perform the elaborate rituals and codes of behaviour expected of her by the *Junker* class. The significance of the library, for this thesis, is that the books are easily accessible and uncensored like Elizabeth's access to the garden. The combination of the garden, the library, and the opportunity to write, intersect with Elizabeth von Arnim's life as lived; as written, and as imagined.

The Nassenheide library features in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *The Solitary Summer*, and *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*. Elizabeth takes her favourite books outdoors to her garden and beyond to the fields, heath and forest to enrich both her intellect and her soul. In this way, her love of books and gardens may be likened to an alchemical reaction in her soul. Books encourage her to dream and imagine, especially outside when they are brought alive by her five senses. She chooses different spaces for different books. She speaks of the authors as if they were her daily companions. She takes Thoreau to a pond in the rye-fields. "He is a person [she says] who loves the open air, and will refuse to give you much pleasure if you try and read him amid the pomp and circumstance of upholstery" (SS, 23). Thoreau, like Elizabeth von Arnim, believed that life should not be a succession of duties, but one of maximum aesthetic felicity. So to read Thoreau indoors would present a diminished experience for Elizabeth. She says. "Books have their idiosyncrasies as well as people, and will not show me their full beauties unless the place and time in which they are read suits them" (SS, 26). In the afternoon she reads Goethe in the garden. In the evening she reads Walt Whitman by the rose beds. In the forests she reads Keats. To the shores of the Baltic she takes Spenser. These books stir her

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wildish soul when read in their appropriate environment, and they become so familiar that she anthropomorphises them to the point where the books themselves become the equivalent of close friends.

The combination of the books and the garden gives Elizabeth “a more just conception of what, in this world, is worth bothering about, and what is not” (SS, 29). In *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*, Elizabeth reads a travel guide of the island of Rügen at a time of drought in the garden, and she says: “[t]he very words made me thirsty—amber shores; lazy waves lapping them slowly; vast spaces for the eye to wander over . . . ” (E in R, 4). She imagines bathing in a secluded sandy cove floating on its crystal surface. Elizabeth’s imagination is stimulated by the felicitous space described in the text. This gives her a yearning to experience the same space with both her body and soul which she eventually does, and then imaginatively writes about it. This represents a purposeful interanimation on the part of Elizabeth von Arnim between her life as imagined, her life as lived, and her life as written.

The garden is a poetic space because it is imagined and expressively described by Elizabeth von Arnim. According to Gaston Bachelard, “poetic space assumes values of expansion” (Bachelard 1969, 201). The felicitous space experienced is created by the “activity of poetic spatiality that goes from deep intimacy to infinite extent” (Bachelard 1969, 202). As Elizabeth savours her solitude in the garden, these two spaces - the space of intimacy and infinite extent - conflate. Her inner experience of the expansiveness of her space is encapsulated in the word “vast” (EGG 3, 48, 180). Bachelard discusses the inner immensity of this word:

[I]t opens up unlimited space. [Teaching] us to breathe with the air that rests on the horizon, far from the walls of the

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chimerical prisons that are the cause of our anguish. The vowel *a* . . . is a sound area that starts with a sigh and extends beyond all limits. . . . With it [the word “vast”] we take infinity into our lungs, and through it, we breathe cosmically.  
(Bachelard 1969, 197)

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, words such as “vast,” “breathless silence,” and “eternity” (EGG 3), evoke organic, non-linear time. Elizabeth’s escapes into expanded consciousness can occur during both day and night and in all seasons, because unlike most of her female protagonists, her escapes into soul space are never accompanied by feelings of guilt. Elizabeth’s garden is the space around which the rest of her life revolves. Her perception of her “real life” happens when she is in her garden.

In *Felicitous Space*, Judith Fryer explores the interconnectedness between space and the female imagination (Fryer 1986, xiii). She says: “Centre implies circumference, a place in space. To find the centre of one’s boundless desire, to give it form, is to begin in a space that is felicitous, one that frees the imagination” (Fryer 1986, 293). The garden is the centre of Elizabeth’s boundless desire and imagination since she has begun the process of becoming in felicitous space. As Clarissa Pinkola Estés states, “To create one must be able to respond” (Estés 1993, 316). Elizabeth can passionately respond to the garden because she can name it as her own space (EGG, 25).<sup>4</sup> The garden at Nassenheide, therefore, was a vital prerequisite for the commencement of her writing career.

Emily Hancock observes, in the metaphorical sense, that “[w]omen have long tended the gardens of others. While providing the context for others’

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<sup>4</sup> In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire describes the importance of naming one’s world in order to begin the process of liberation from oppressive systems.

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development they have historically neglected their own" (Hancock, 1990, 84). Elizabeth refuses guilt, atonement, and self abnegation. For her, churches and organised religion wither rather than nourish her soul. Elizabeth comes to recognise and reject the control mechanisms of patriarchal structures such as the institution of the church. Elizabeth's garden at Nassenheide is one in which she has disempowered the biblical myth of the Fall by deconstructing it. In her imaginative dismantling and reimagining of it, Elizabeth von Arnim subverts this pervasive myth of the dominant culture, thereby consciously freeing herself from the power of its ideological roots. She describes an afternoon in the garden with her three children. She has not finished telling the traditional story of Adam and Eve when "the April baby's eyes opened wider and wider, and her face grew redder and redder" (EGG, 61). The little girl interrupts before the finish to tell her own version:

Once upon a time there was Adam and Eva, and they had  
*plenty* of clothes, and there was no snake, and *lieber Gott*  
*wasn't* angry with them, and they could eat as *many* apples as  
they liked, and was happy for ever and ever—*there* now!  
(EGG, 62)

Without directly condemning the myth herself, Elizabeth von Arnim has proposed a different world view, free of the guilt associated with original sin to which she was not directly associated. In a playfully subversive way, she reveals the myth's misogynistic qualities through the eyes and mouth of a child, thereby protecting the sentiment from social disapproval. In this way, Elizabeth von Arnim as writer, renders the myth as arbitrary and impotent. Elizabeth's "helpless" (EGG, 62) protestations to the child and telling her "severely" that "these stories are true" (EGG, 62), are written to give the impression that the child is not convinced. Elizabeth's social voice

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intervenes here as she claims her independence from it. In this way, the voice she uses is ironic, and contributes to the development of the dual narrative in this passage.

Earlier in the book, Elizabeth von Arnim has laid the ground for this further questioning of the myth when she ironically laments that “if Eve had had a spade in Paradise and known what to do with it, we should not have had all that sad business with the apple” (EGG, 26). In developing different interpretations of the myth so irreverently, Elizabeth strengthens her attack on a major historical root of oppression for women. The myth, in its blaming of women for the Fall, has subordinated women to the point where many have internalised the need to atone for Eve’s disobedience. This is done often out of guilt which is not directly related to them - except that which is relayed through religious belief. It is difficult to create a free space in which to think and affirm the soul’s reality when such a condition as unresolvable guilt exists. This is one way that the patriarchal religious structures have subtly kept women in a subservient position, and Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates this through her writing.

A woman’s duty may be seen as a way of atonement for the sin of Eve. Elizabeth’s husband complains about the time she wastes making lists and plans for her garden. She responds by saying to him: “I don’t like Duty—everything in the least disagreeable is always sure to be one’s duty. Why cannot it be my duty to make lists and plans for the dear garden?” Her husband tells her why: ““No,” he replied sagely; “your garden is not your Duty, because it is your Pleasure’” (EGG, 94-95), thus confirming for her that his point of view is based on the idea that sin is associated with pleasure. It is commonly assumed that pleasure was instrumental in Eve’s downfall.



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Elizabeth von Arnim's treatment of the theology of heaven and hell makes it appear to be an absurd construction in the instance of one of her children judging another sibling. This occurs when "[t]he April baby . . . lifting her finger, pointed it at the criminal in just indignation. 'Such a child will *never* go into the *Himmel*,' she said with great emphasis, and the air of one who delivers judgment" (EGG, 63). Although humorous, this passage shows that very early in her life, a woman internalises the voices of oppression that give rewards for virtue and duty, and punishment for pleasure. In her garden Elizabeth has proved that there is no monopoly on absolute truth: tea roses will grow outdoors, rather than in a hothouse. Everything is open to discovery and change. This particular wilderness garden is one where Elizabeth can learn through her mistakes without condemnation and where her experience is valid because she has a large degree of control. Her "kingdom of heaven" (EGG, 7) is to be found in this life rather than an after-life, but it must be allowed to develop and be enjoyed in concert with the natural cycles of life and the seasons.

Elizabeth von Arnim not only deconstructs the patriarchal myths of control but she also defamiliarizes liturgical language in its traditional use. For instance, she describes herself as being "sanctified by the presence and scent of the most gorgeous lilac masses" (EGG, 11). "Masses" seems an obvious pun intended following the words "sanctified" and "presence". It is by means of her garden that she "grew in grace" (EGG, 11). It is in the garden, she says, that she finds "absolution" (EGG, 33) and "benediction" (EGG, 207), and this is contrasted with a drafty, unwelcoming church interior.

She describes a service on a stormy New Year's Eve to provide a vivid contrast between her realisation of what constitutes felicitous space and a

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spirituality of her own, and the infelicitous space of an alien and infelicitous spirituality:

the parson in his gloomy pulpit . . . took on an awful appearance of menacing Authority as he raised his voice to make himself heard above the clatter. Sitting there in the dark, I felt very small, and solitary, and defenceless, alone in a great, big, black world. The church was as cold as a tomb; some of the candles guttered and went out: the parson in his black robe spoke of death and judgement; I thought I heard a child's voice screaming, and could hardly believe it was only the wind . . . I had a horrid feeling that I should probably be well punished, though for what I had no precise idea.  
(EGG, 128-129).

This example is a description of the feelings that were invoked in Elizabeth when she named the reality of her church experience. The image of the screaming child trapped in this foreboding, infelicitous interior contrasts dramatically with Elizabeth's memories of felicitous childhood, and later adult experiences outdoors in gardens, where she had the opportunity to reflect on different situations and locations, and the differences in her feelings towards each of them.

In *The Solitary Summer*, Elizabeth expresses the desire to be free of any visitors to Nassenheide for a whole summer "so that [her] soul may have time to grow" (SS, 1). She craves solitude for this to happen, saying to her husband, "'Wouldn't it be perfect to get up every morning for weeks and feel that you belong to yourself and to nobody else?'" (SS, 5). This sentiment is ironic, since her husband takes this feeling for granted, as his right, every morning of his life. He cannot, therefore imagine the difference between belonging to himself and not belonging to himself.

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The summer turns out to be one of contrasting felicitous and infelicitous space for Elizabeth. She directly experiences the coercive force of the state when the army carries out manoeuvres in the district, and the von Arnims are obliged to provide food and lodgings for five hundred soldiers with horses, as well as thirty officers, with servants, staying in the house itself. Elizabeth is reluctantly confined mostly indoors to entertain and perform duties. There is no-one to whom she can articulate her pleasure in her garden. She would strain her ears at an open window, in an attempt to hear the larks singing high in the sky as the soldiers spoke to her of "all the races their horses [won] as completely as though [the larks] did not exist" (SS, 173). She continues to contrast the patriarchal space engulfing her at this time with the felicitous, female-centred space of her garden. She says:

All day long I am giving out table linen, ordering meals . . . making appropriate and amiable remarks to officers, and trying to look as though I were happy; while out in the garden . . . how strongly the scent of roses and ripe fruit is, how the sleepy bees drone round the flowers, how warmly the sun shines in that corner where the little Spanish chestnut is turning yellow—the first to turn, and never afterwards surpassed in autumn beauty.  
(SS, 173)

Indoors, with the officers, Elizabeth von Arnim's imagination is stirred by her memories of the experiences of her senses of hearing, sight, sound, smell and touch in the garden, causing her to yearn to be there. This yearning deepens her realisation of the importance of the garden space in her life.

Elizabeth von Arnim recognised that she and her husband represented two very different economies. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous describes a male-centred economy with a propensity to exploit and dominate

nature, and a female-centred economy which promotes a soul-based ethic of nurturing and growth. The presence of the army heightened the difference between her economy and the economies of patriarchy. Elizabeth's economy affiliates with the abundance and excess of nature "anonymously lavished" (EGG, 206), where there is never a lack, in contrast to the limited, mean patriarchal economy. In defining the economy of her soul, she contrasts it with the soul-less economy of her husband who,

loathes picnics, and has no eye for nature . . . and is simply bored by a long drive through a forest that does not belong to him; a single turnip on his own place is more admirable in his eyes than the tallest, pinkest, straightest pine that ever reared its snow-crowned head against the setting sunlight. Now observe the superiority of woman, who sees that both are good, and after having gazed at the pine and been made happy by its beauty, goes home and placidly eats the turnip.  
(EGG, 178-179)

The two different economies are manifested in two opposing voices. Elizabeth's voice is one of *jouissance*,<sup>5</sup> revealing her felicitous connection and identification with nature. The voice of her husband, the Man of Wrath, represents the voice of patriarchy opposing and controlling; disdainful of both nature and women and assuming the patriarchal illusion of objectivity. Unlike Elizabeth's voice, his appears to be disembodied and emotionless. He represents the voice of patriarchy in so much as he does not consider himself as a part of nature, but rather superior to it. It is often a voice of condescending benevolence.

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<sup>5</sup> *Jouissance* is a word used by French literary theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. There is not an equivalent word in English, since it translates literally as "women's sexual pleasure". In the French, however, it has a more expansive, cosmic meaning concerning women's pleasure, and so enhances the concept in this thesis of felicitous, female-centred space.

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Elizabeth's husband represents the historical division of body and mind. The concept of soul, as described by Elizabeth von Arnim, dissolves the historical polarity of body and mind. The patriarchal concept of soul has been lofty, abstract and disembodied. Religious theology teaches that a soul is something that must be "saved" by subscribing to a belief system. Elizabeth's imaginative soul is affected by the body and mind's experience of a world outside of belief systems. Elizabeth embodies her soul in her writing, taking it down to grass roots in a number of ways. "My soul [she says] never thinks of beginning to wake up . . . completely till it has been taken out of doors and aired in the sunshine" (EGG, 68). Elizabeth finds that outdoors she can give bodily expression to the imaginative part of her soul. She experiences space with her whole body in the garden and describes a felicitous time of dancing alone there (EGG, 2). By embodying the soul in her imagination, Elizabeth von Arnim subverts the traditional orthodox sin/redemption theology with its contempt for the body, women, and nature.

In writing *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* Elizabeth von Arnim has moved beyond the "happily ever after" endings of popular romance novels. Her writing expresses an ironic ambivalence towards the ideology of romantic love and the oppressiveness of the institution of marriage. In *Tales Of Love* Julia Kristeva discusses how romantic love has become the privileged site of the passion signs (Kristeva, 1987, 16). Elizabeth, however, has subversively made the garden the privileged site of the passion signs. Her first words in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* are, "I love my garden." It is her garden, and not heterosexual love, that is for her "the supreme guarantee of renewal" (Kristeva 1987, 16).

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In literature, there exists a tradition of the paradisaical garden as the site of heterosexual love. In Elizabeth's conscious experience, happiness has not resulted from marriage vows, but rather those she made to nature (EGG, 8), and as if to emphasize this, in spring, when she begins the diary she says the garden "looks like a wedding" (EGG, 3). It is in her garden that she feels "protected and at home, and every flower and weed is a friend and every tree a lover. When I have been vexed, [she says] I run out to them for comfort" (EGG, 33). As Nancy A. Walker observes: "the romance reformulates the fairy tale in which the woman's struggle to "become" is presumed to end when her identity is conferred by the man who selects her" (Walker 1990, 37). In the popular romance novel, the heroine runs to the arms of her lover for comfort. In a thunderstorm, however, Elizabeth runs out into the garden rather than into the house and she takes pleasure in sitting out of doors, wrapped in furs, with the thermometer well below freezing (EGG, 87).

Undercurrents of Elizabeth von Arnim's subversion of the popular romance genre are presented by her husband, the Man of Wrath, while in a conversation with Elizabeth and two of her women friends:

Who could murmur pretty speeches on the beauty of a common sacrifice, if the listener's want of imagination was such as to enable her only to distinguish one victim, in the picture, and that one herself. . . . Who indulges more recklessly in glowing exaggerations than the lover who hopes, and has not yet obtained? He will, like the nightingale, sing with unceasing modulation, display all his talent, untiringly repeat his notes, until he has what he wants, when his song, like the nightingale's immediately ceases, never again to be heard. (EGG, 140)

It is ironic that it is Elizabeth's husband articulating Elizabeth's own

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experience of him as a suitor when he put considerable energy into courting her. However, once the ring was on her finger, she became his possession and the discourse of romantic love ceased. *The Solitary Summer* continues the ambivalent tone towards marriage and concludes with an ironic love scene between Elizabeth and her husband. Elizabeth says: "And so the Man of Wrath and I fade away into dimness and muteness, my head resting on his shoulder, and his arm encircling my waist; and what could possibly be more proper, more praiseworthy, or more picturesque?" (SS, 190). A woman's head, inclined towards a man, and resting on his shoulder is an iconographic romantic pose of dependancy by the woman, and superiority on the part of the man. The last three adjectives reveal the subversive subtext.

The Nassenheide garden represents a refusal of all that, historically, has meant closure for women, especially marriage as a conclusion to a woman's life. In the garden, Elizabeth von Arnim is able to use the distance between her own female-centred space and the male-centred space of indoors to develop a greater understanding of herself in relation to society and its expectations of her. It is this distance which enables the emergence of her ironic voice that decentres, dislocates, and destabilises the ideology and language of the dominant male culture. Assumptions about romantic love, marriage, gender, identity, woman's desire, duty and pleasure are called into question. Her ambivalence to marriage is introduced with gentle, playful, ironic humour in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and her other loosely autobiographical writings, but assumes a more cogent tone in her later work.

Elizabeth von Arnim's publishing of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was dependent on rules that were not of her making, however in the writing process, she was able to create a Self with whom she could identity and

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renamed this Self, Elizabeth. It marked a beginning of a process of development for her Self and simultaneously as a writer. Elizabeth expresses relief at her ability to write her pleasure in the writing of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and its sequel *The Solitary Summer*. This relief, she says, comes “after years of study in the art of holding [her] tongue” (SS, 131). The word “study” is suggestive of social construction, and this construction becomes specifically gendered when she says a little later: “it is painful being suppressed for ever and ever, and I believe the torments of such a state, when unduly prolonged, are more keenly felt by a woman than a man . . .” (SS, 132).

Whenever she writes, and whenever she is in the garden, Elizabeth’s expression is not silenced by a “cold stare of utter incomprehension, or the look of indulgent superiority that awaits any exposure of a feeling not in the least understood” (SS, 131). Elizabeth validates the expression of her felicity by stating that failure to enter into, or understand another’s thoughts reflects on the inadequacies of the recipient rather than the communicator. One of Elizabeth von Arnim’s first critics, Quiller-Couch, writing in the *Spectator*, condemned “her mind [to be] . . . of that order which finds a smart self-satisfaction in proclaiming how thoroughly it is dominated by self” (quoted in EGG, vii). As Luce Irigaray says, “What is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure” (Irigaray 1991, 125). In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim broke that censorship and expressed her pleasure on a number of levels in a female-centred space that Quiller-Couch was threatened by and refused to recognise.

When Elizabeth von Arnim reread her private diary thirty-nine years after the publication of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, she noted that her response on the day she was told of the book’s acceptance for publication



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was to state the fact, but not her feelings about the event: "Got answer re G.G. [*Elizabeth and Her German Garden*] accepting it." (quoted in Usborne 1986, 69). She then wrote in the rest of the available space in the old diary:

I note I make no comment on this, to me great news, but I vividly remember my heavenly happiness that day at the family luncheon, hugging my secret. I think this was perhaps the most purely happy moment of my life and I make no comment.

(quoted in Usborne 1986, 69)

The earlier private diary entry reflects the degree of control Elizabeth von Arnim was accustomed to internalising at the time she submitted *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* for publication, and this contrasts with the pleasure articulated in the entry added years later. The significance of the extent of her happiness at the publication of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was firstly, that it represented a vindication of her ability to write in a way that expressed her pleasure. Secondly, she devised a way of being able to express her world view, using the protective strategy of an encoded dual narrative. It is an example of how Elizabeth von Arnim's life gives soul to her text, and her text, in turn, gives soul to her life.

The significance for Elizabeth von Arnim of writing *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was that she was able to start her writing career with a new self-chosen name. This had implications for her literary career as well as her personal career, and freed her to write within patriarchal codes of censorship, yet expressing her reality in an encoded form. During the writing process she developed subversions of patriarchal institutions including marriage, religion and politics. Elizabeth von Arnim pitted herself against these patriarchal institutions to show their absurdity, using the technique of irony.

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She revealed the discriminatory nature of German laws as they affected women politically. She deconstructed women's traditional activities and duties, exposing how they seemed deliberately constructed to prevent women from developing a powerful sense of identity.

In this chapter, the garden in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* has been shown to be of central significance because of its function as a metaphor representing female-centred space, as well as the protection and development of Elizabeth's soul. As Elizabeth von Arnim the writer, shows, her life is intricately interanimated with her writing, and the process of that writing is crucial to her process of becoming in a female-centred space. This thesis will further develop the dialectical movement between Elizabeth von Arnim's life and other chosen texts, where the symbolism of the garden, and other interrelated metaphors, are shown to be an important part of the interanimation.

### 3

## San Salvatore: The Italian Garden

*The question is often asked, "What do women want?"*

*We want men to stand out of our sunshine, that is all.*

—MARGARET SIEVWRIGHT, 1896

The four female characters in *The Enchanted April* compromise their female-centred space. All four have a desire for felicitous space, and though they are able to create that space in an Italian castle and garden, the development of their conscious need to protect and maintain female-centred space does not occur. Their self definition develops only as far as being a tender shoot, and is withered by the presence of men entering the female-centred space, since two of women desire the fulfilment of the romance plot despite their past infelicitous experience of it. The belief systems of these two women, which emanate from patriarchal institutions, combined with a lack of a framework to understand their inner conflicts and contradictions, show how they compromise not only their process of becoming, but also that of the two other women present.

The title of Elizabeth von Arnim's novel, *The Enchanted April*, signifies a particular space and a particular time. The time is the season of spring and the space is women-centred and felicitous. It is women's space and women's

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time. Four women are drawn together by an advertisement in "The Times" offering a castle in Italy for rent. It began, "To those who Appreciate Wisteria and Sunshine" (EA, 1). The advertisement stirs the imagination of Lotty Wilkins and Rose Arbuthnot and both are then temporarily "lost in dreams—of light, of colour, of fragrance, of the soft lapping of the sea among little hot rocks" (EA, 8), just as Elizabeth von Arnim's days, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, "seemed to melt away in a dream of pink and purple peace" (EGG, 10). Likewise, it was the imagery in a book about Rugen describing the island "[rising] as a dream of far-away" (E in R, 3) that first drew Elizabeth von Arnim to visiting it, and later writing about it in *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*. All three previous quotations stir the imagination of the women and evoke a quality or dimension of experiencing life that has been missing from their lives.

For "Mrs" Lotty Wilkins and "Mrs" Rose Arbuthnot, their lives are dominated and structured by the lives of their husbands. The narrator frequently designates their marital status, and this serves to signify firstly, that their identity resides in relationship to a man, and secondly, that the husband has sexual ownership rights over his wife (Spender, 1980, 26-8).<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth von Arnim shows how a woman's inability to name herself, and her acceptance of a name that relates to a man and not herself, contributes to her oppression. As has been previously mentioned, May Beauchamp von Arnim, in renaming herself Elizabeth, freed herself of all patriarchal titles. The older Mrs Fisher, ( a widow), although free of Mr Fisher, chooses to live in a male-centred space of stasis and desiccation. She insists on reflecting

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Spender explains the historical origins of the titles "Miss" and "Mrs".

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only on the past, and resists both the pleasure of the present moment, and the anticipation of future pleasure. Her house in London is full of signed photographs of illustrious Victorian male writers, such as Carlyle and Tennyson, whom she had met as a child when her father was an eminent critic. She tells anecdotes of these men, but cannot speak with her own voice. Mrs Fisher expresses a sole wish, "*to be allowed to sit . . . in the sun and remember*" (EA, 46, emphasis added). She does not have to ask permission any more from a husband, yet because she has internalised her gendered hierarchical position, she continues, as the emphasized quotation shows, to use the language of the oppressed. Her identification with patriarchal space is symbolized by her continuing to wear mourning black, though it is eleven years since her husband's death.

Lady Caroline Dexter represents a subversion of the beautiful heroine of the romance novel who longs to be completed by a man in a relationship of inequality. Caroline, in contrast, "[hated] the idea of husbands" (EA, 118) and "was afraid of nothing in life except love" (EA, 313). She is apprehensive of the romance plot, yet she feels trapped since she cannot imagine an alternative female-centred space where she can nourish her soul and feel free to choose other paths. Caroline is weary of being desired solely for her appearance, and wants to escape the effects that her physical beauty has on men and women. Experience has taught her that men desire to possess her, and for this reason some women see her competitively and feel threatened by her. She "has a longing to get away from everybody she had ever known" (EA, 43-44), out of their gaze. As John Berger perceives, "Women watch

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themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (Berger, 1972, 47). Caroline has been socially constructed to survey herself through the eyes of men rather than through her own eyes. In her garden at Nassenheide, Elizabeth has the time and space enough to distance from indoors where she is both surveyed and surveys herself through the patriarchal gaze. The women-centred space of the garden frees Elizabeth von Arnim from the sense of being Other. Instead, in the garden she is subject, and everyone else is Other.

When Lotty reads the advertisement, her imagination contrasts two diverse spaces. She visualises the fluid, sunlit images of Mediterranean shores, and begins to contrast these with images of her life in London which, in comparison, are stagnant, and unchanging: the frequent rain, the dark underground rail, cooking the food of her husband's choice rather than her own, "and to-morrow the same and the day after the same and always the same. . . ." (WA, 8). The repetition of full stops at the end of the quotation, as well as the lack of commas symbolizes the monotonous repetition of routine, without any felicitous spaces in between. The sunlit Mediterranean images, however, represent the felicitous open-endedness that the garden symbolizes for Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Lotty's infelicitous images of London recall Elizabeth's oppressive and repetitious indoor duties of the daily counting out sausages, the tedious ritual of lengthy mealtimes, and her obligatory visits to oppressive church interiors and services every Sunday.

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Lotty and Rose sense each other's unhappiness. Lotty observes Rose to have "the face of a patient and disappointed Madonna" (EA, 7). Rose observes Lotty to have "the eyes of an imprisoned dog" (EA, 9). These are images of powerlessness and passivity. As Thomas Moore observes, "Day by day we make decisions that either support or disturb the soul" (Moore 1992, 4). Lotty and Rose, after years of making decisions that have disturbed their soul, are about to make one in support of their soul by journeying out of patriarchal space into a new female-centred space of their own, reflecting their reality and their values.

In *The Enchanted April* Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates the considerable energy and courage needed by disempowered women in order to claim felicitous space for the first time. As Clarissa Pinkola Estés says, the nourishing of soul requires agency, and she describes this as "the work of soulful reclamation" (Estés 1993, 6). The soul does not flourish when controlled, and its independent creativity and development are a contradiction to the stasis and enclosure of patriarchal space. In *The Enchanted April*, Elizabeth von Arnim develops the thematic concept that she introduced in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* of institutional oppressions and ideological constructions of gender causing a woman to devalue herself, thus denying her soul's desire for felicitous space.

Through the interior discourse of its characters, the text of *The Enchanted April* illustrates the conflicts that each female character experiences in identifying and acknowledging the desires of her soul, as well

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as the conflict of these desires with social demands and expectations. Lotty and Rose experience as much trauma acknowledging their need for felicitous space, as deciding to act upon that acknowledgement. For instance, when Lotty suggests to Rose that they rent the castle, "she [flushes] to the roots of her hair, for the sound of what she, [Lotty], was saying, of what was coming pouring out, frightened her, and yet she couldn't stop . . ." (EA, 15). What is happening within Lotty's soul and manifesting in her body at this moment is vividly described by Hélène Cixous in "The Laugh of The Medusa": For Cixous, the woman speaking, like Lotty, "throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself . . . all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare" (Cixous 1979, 251). Although the meeting between Lotty and Rose takes place in a women's club, Lotty whispers, "as though she were afraid of being overheard" (EA, 15). The desperate desires of her soul are in conflict with her social construction. Elizabeth von Arnim shows that when women internalise the consciousness of the oppressor, they become divided beings who find it difficult to adequately speak or act on their own behalf.

This is an important moment in *The Enchanted April*. It is as significant as Elizabeth's first sighting of the garden at Nassenheide, which marked a recognition of the difference that the garden would make to her quality of life and happiness. Lotty, as described in the previous paragraph, speaks from her soul's position and its need for the nourishment of felicitous space, and in doing so she creates an opening that holds the possibility of this space occurring. Rose thinks that Lotty is "unbalanced" (EA, 17). This is because Rose is accustomed to speaking and hearing the discourses of the dominant



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culture that have constructed her as Other. She has denied her soul and body its voice and its pleasure. Rose initially tries to suppress the stirrings of her soul and is loathe to go away with Lotty - a woman she doesn't know and therefore cannot trust. Elizabeth von Arnim reveals the alienation of women from each other in a patriarchal culture where women devalue other women as they themselves are devalued. Furthermore, women are often in competition with each other for identification with, and approval from men, and so keep each other at a distance. As Luce Irigaray states, "a male-dominated culture . . . relies on women's renunciation of their relations to other women, and of their unmediated relations to their own bodies and pleasures" (quoted in Grosz 1989, 135).

In *The Enchanted April*, as in her other texts, Elizabeth von Arnim shows how "belief [systems] destroy identity . . . and goes against what experience teaches" (Irigaray 1993, 28). Rose, who is devoutly religious, is challenged in her concepts of "heaven" and "home" by Lotty who is sure that felicity should be experienced before death, rather than defer it for an uncertain after-life. Here is an important theme of the interanimation between Elizabeth von Arnim's life and text. Elizabeth's "kingdom of heaven" (EGG, 7) is her garden. It is here, not in a church that she finds "absolution" and "benediction" (EA, 33, 207). In the garden she "grows in grace" (EGG, 11). Rose begins to feel the discomfort of her own contradictions and tensions between her belief and her experience: "She too has doubts about homes" (EA, 17). For Elizabeth, home is out of doors in her garden, not in the house or the church. Clarissa Pinkola Estés says that within the soul

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there is a "homing device" which causes a woman to choose a means by which to reach the symbolic home of the soul (Estés 1993, 269). It was the Nassenheide garden that activated Elizabeth's homing device. Felicitous space is where the soul feels at home. The newspaper advertisement activated this homing device within Lotty and Rose. As Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty perceive:

"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.

(Martin and Mohanty 1986, 196)

The narrative voice of *The Enchanted April* emphatically states: "Steady as the points of the compass to Mrs Arbuthnot were the four great facts of life: God, Husband, Home, Duty" (EA, 18). Here then, is an example of the dialectical movement between Elizabeth von Arnim's life and her text, since these are also the compass points that Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, is expected to put before her Self. These compass points represent the static, enclosed spaces of patriarchal institutions. The open-ended space of the garden, however, transcends these enclosed spaces of the compass which are the centre of these women's lives. Although the German garden was on the boundary of patriarchal space, paradoxically, it becomes the centre of Elizabeth's life.

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Rose Arbuthnot, however, “had a great dread of being awakened out of so *simple and untroublesome a condition*” (EA, 18, emphasis added). God, Husband, Home and Duty have never, historically, been a “simple and untroublesome a condition” for women. They have often been quite the contrary. A “condition” however, ironically suggests a chronic illness. Rose’s chronic condition is one that is affecting her soul and body. Historically, women have often become chronically ill when their society, culture or their internalization of society’s codes allow them no felicitous female-centred space away from God, Husband, Home and Duty.

The oppression of being confined by these four fixed compass points has the effect of deadening the soul. It is Rose’s unconscious denial that makes the compass points seem “simple” and “untroublesome”; yet ironically, oppression is not simple and can be much more than merely troublesome. If Rose chose to awaken the neglected places of her soul, it would mean her calling into question the foundational beliefs of her life that she knows would be difficult for her to revoke. In her previous disillusionment with the marriage plot, Rose has merely substituted one patriarch for another in her transference of devotion along the compass from Husband to God. The ironic narrative voice says, “Frederick had been the kind of husband whose wife betakes herself early to the feet of God” (EA, 20). She wanted to shut out anything that would remind her of the unfulfilled promises and desires of the romance plot.

All four women have repressed the life of their souls and they are, metaphorically, hungry. They exhibit what Clarissa Pinkola Estés calls

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*hambre del alma*, (the hungry soul) (Estés 1993, 6). The food of the church, their marriages, and other institutions has not been satisfying, and their acceptance of this malnourishing soul food has only served to fulfil the requirements of the dominant male culture.

Internalising the perspective of the dominant male culture, Rose tries to “classify Mrs Wilkins, [and] get her safely under her proper heading” (EA, 17, emphasis added), just as Elizabeth’s husband, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* does when he cites the German law classing women with children and idiots as “a very proper classification” (EGG, 137, emphasis added). Rose does this in order to resist Lotty’s influence, since she feels the disrupting influence of her own soul as it prepares to resist the expectations of the dominant culture and create a new space with wider margins. Rose has been strongly influenced by theological dogma to believe that the experience of “fleeting” pleasures results in a false happiness (EA, 19). True happiness, she has been told, comes from living solely for others. Consequently, she has great difficulty in justifying the spending of her savings on her pleasure.

Lotty has been instructed by her husband that “if one were efficient one wouldn’t be depressed, and that if one does one’s job well one becomes automatically bright and brisk” (EA, 6). In the context of Elizabeth von Arnim and her husband, this would mean being more “Prussian”. Neither Rose nor Lotty have what Clarissa Pinkola Estés describes as “matrilineal lines of initiation” (Estés 1993, 264); that is, role models who could legitimise their claim to felicitous space.

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Virtue is a quality that is idealized in women by both religious dogma and the social construct of femininity. Lotty questions her years of continuous duty with an outstanding deficit of pleasure, doubting that anybody loved her any better for the sacrifice. She struggles to articulate her longing for "something else" (EA, 22). To Rose she says, "I see you've been good for years and years, because you look so unhappy . . ." (EA, 23). Rose goes through a process of denial as she asks herself how she can feel miserable when she has "[placed herself] unreservedly in God's hands" (EA, 24). The irony exists in the word "unreservedly," which reveals her lack of agency in the direction her life is taking. The consequence of this has been the giving away of her power and autonomy.

After the letter of application for the renting of the Italian *castello* is sent, Rose "was really extraordinarily moved, and she felt happy, and she felt guilty, and she felt afraid, and she had all the feelings, *though this she did not know*, of a woman who has come away from a secret meeting with her lover" (EA, 28, emphasis added). The words, "though this she did not know," suggest that the Author, herself, was conscious of this feeling. It is similar to the feeling Elizabeth von Arnim describes in her autobiographical writing of returning indoors after time spent in her garden space. Rose's feeling of pleasure and guilt and fear over the decision reveal the contradictions and tensions she is experiencing between the desire of her soul for felicitous space and the constrictions of her social construction. The money that will pay for the holiday is that which she would, ordinarily, give to the poor. She is ashamed that it is from the proceeds of her husband's popular memoirs of the mistresses of kings. For a whole day Lotty and Rose decided against the

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decision to go to Italy, and in doing so “they really realised how acute had been their longing for it” (EA, 38). Lotty faced her husband, a solicitor, with “a mixture of guilt, terror and determination” as she told him about her plan to go to Italy. He “cross-examined her with the utmost severity. . . . He demanded that, since she had so outrageously accepted [the holiday] without consulting him, she should write and cancel her acceptance” (EA, 57). In this way he treats her like a rebellious child, or some-one he would cross examine on the witness stand, instead of an autonomous adult. Then he demands proof in the form of Mrs Arbuthnot. Rose’s husband was away when she departed for Italy, so she leaves a note for him explaining her need for a holiday, but not her whereabouts.

Mr Wilkins notes in his mind “the peculiar, persistant vileness of the weather” (EA, 56) in London at this time. This forecast seems ironically analogous to the oppression that he exercises consistantly over Mrs Wilkins. When Lotty and Rose first meet, the weather is rainy, cold, and miserable and there are constant references to it in the text. Both indoors and outdoors in London represent infelicitous space.

Elizabeth von Arnim has gone to considerable length to show the kinds of oppressions - internalised and external - faced by Lotty and Rose to be overcome in order for them to reach for, and create felicitous space. Elizabeth von Arnim also shows the considerable courage and energy required of these women to justify their pleasure. Even on the train platform, as they are about to escape, they continue to justify their action. They demonstrate recognition

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that their compliance in their oppression has denied them the status of "real human beings" (EA, 58). This ensures a striking contrast between the infelicitous space of London and the felicitous space of Italy. In Italy, there are no justifications that are required or given for their pleasure.

On reaching the castle of San Salvatore, Lotty put her arm around Rose's neck and kisses her. This marks the beginning of a felicitous, female-centred relationship and hints at ironic subversion of the romance plot. The *castello* and gardens on top of a hill with a winding path leading up to it would be recognised by the women as a typical traditional literary setting for the heterosexual love plot. However, when "Mrs Wilkins" awakens on her first morning at San Salvatore, she positively savours her solitude. She has no desire for anything resembling romantic love. She delights "in the cool roominess of it, the freedom of one's movements, the sense of recklessness, of audacity, in giving the blankets a pull if one wanted to. . . . It was like the discovery of an entirely new joy" (EA, 77). She experiences the rare feeling of anticipation as she wonders what she will see when she looks out the window. "She lay putting off the great moment of going to the window as one puts off opening a precious letter" (EA, 76). When she does so "[t]he sun poured in on her. . . . Lovely scents came up to the window and caressed her. A tiny breeze gently lifted her hair" (EA, 78). This is the language of romantic thralldom - however, the lovers are Lotty and the garden. An intertextual animation takes place at this point, when this passage recalls Elizabeth, in *The Solitary Summer* saying:

Each morning the simple act of opening my bedroom windows  
is the means of giving me an ever-recurring pleasure. Just

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underneath them is a border of rockets in full flower . . . and they send up their goodmorning of scent the moment they see me leaning out. . . . I call back mine, embellished with many endearing words, and then their fragrance comes up close, and covers my face with gentlest little kisses.  
(SS, 55)

Lotty looks out at the garden below and across the bay to the mountains. The spaciousness and beauty nourishes her soul as well as her body: "She moved about with quick, purposeful steps, her long thin body held up straight, her small face, so much puckered at home with effort and fear, smoothed out" (EA, 80). When Lotty asks Rose if she has ever felt so happy, Rose replies that she hadn't and then inwardly recalls that, even at the beginning of her relationship with her husband, "pain had been close at hand in that other happiness ready to torture with doubts" (EA, 85). "That other happiness" seems ironic, since the conventional romance plot promises happiness, but, in reality, often brings disillusionment and unhappiness. She describes this present happiness as one of "complete harmony with her surroundings" (EA, 85).

Rose spends a day by herself, out of sight and sound of the castle, in a place where she begins to experience the pleasure of solitude and a sense of being connected with nature:

The place was a hidden corner where the sun-baked stones were padded with thyme and nobody was likely to come. . . . presently lizards darted over her feet, and some tiny birds like finches . . . flitted among the bushes round her just as if she hadn't been there.



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(EA, 210)

Here, Rose begins to experience a change in consciousness. She felt no desire to pray as she had done consistently in London, and she began to reflect on the meaning of her life since, for a long time, “she had taken care to have no time to think” (EA, 209). By this strategy, Rose had ensured she was always aligned with patriarchal culture, rather than venturing into the uncharted and unknown female-centred space.

Initially, each woman desires to be alone for long stretches of time: Mrs Fisher in her room, Lady Caroline in a chair in the top garden, and Mrs Wilkins and Mrs Arbuthnot in the gardens and hills. Each is free to reflect on her life and begin to have a clearer understanding of herself in relation to others. At night their dreams were “entirely different from the heavy dreams of home” (EA, 196). It was as if the place itself - San Salvatore - made love to each of them. For instance, the garden of San Salvatore is described as a place “where the air was so still that it held its breath, where the light was so golden that the most ordinary things were transfigured,—to be transported into that delicate warmth, that caressing fragrance . . . was an astonishing contrast” (EA, 197).

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth’s descriptions of her intimate relationship with her garden also give this impression, especially when she describes one particular experience in the garden as being “very precious and private, and close to my soul . . . as though I had been quite near to the very core of things” (SS, 62). Because “San Salvatore was rich in small

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gardens in different parts and on different levels" (EA, 82), it meant that each woman could find a space where she could enjoy solitude and privacy as Elizabeth did in her garden at Nassenheide.

When the location of the novel moves from the infelicitous space of London to the felicitous space of San Salvatore in Italy, the text describes the organic progressions of spring unfolding, right through the month of April, just as the texts of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and *The Solitary Summer* do. The descriptions in *The Enchanted April* are perhaps even more expressive than in the former two texts. For example:

That first week the wistaria began to fade, and the flowers of the Judas-tree and peach-trees fell off and carpeted the ground with rose-colour. Then all the freesias disappeared, and the irises grew scarce. And then, while these were clearing themselves away, the double banksia roses came out. . . . By the end of the week, the fig-trees were giving shade, [and] the plum-blossom was out among the olives. . . .  
(EA, 218)

The intermittent descriptions of the extravagant beauty of the gardens at San Salvatore represent an economy of openendedness, abundance, spaciousness, generosity and felicity; in effect, an economy of soulfulness, placing value on quality, relatedness, and personal substance. This reflects the excess of the female-centred space as opposed to a deficit or lack, the latter having been used, historically, to define women. As Lotty looks at the garden of San Salvatore, she remembers a spring in London when she bought six tulips, knowing that her husband would think the cost "inexcusable" (EA, 83).

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Rose savoured the scent of masses of freesias at San Salvatore. In London she could never afford them, but sometimes went into a shop just to put a bunch to her nose. These organic progressions of spring unfolding are juxtaposed with descriptions of the growth and transformation happening within each of the four women.

For the first week, Mrs Fisher, continually sat in a chair indoors as she had intended to do. She reflected that "hardly anything was really worthwhile . . . except the past" (EA, 132). However, one day she ventured outside the castle walls and her gaze extended "across the tops of some purple hyacinths at the Gulf of Spezia glittering beyond a headland" (EA, 208). In her autobiographical writings, Elizabeth von Arnim is often extending her gaze and thus, widening her boundaries and experience of felicitous space. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* she describes "endless forest stretching along the shore as far as the eye can reach" (EGG, 179). Mrs Fisher's experience outdoors encourages her to begin walking without her stick, and by the second week,

she had a curious sensation, which worried her, of rising sap. She knew the feeling, because she sometimes had it in childhood in specially swift springs, when the lilacs and the syringas seemed to rush out into blossom in a single night, but it was strange to have it again. She would have liked to remark on the sensation to some one, but she was ashamed. It was such an absurd sensation at her age. . . . She had heard of dried staffs, pieces of mere dead wood, suddenly putting forth fresh leaves, but only in legend. She knew perfectly what was due to herself. Dignity demanded that she should have nothing to do with fresh leaves at her age; and yet there it was,—the feeling that presently, that at any moment now, she

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might crop out all green.

(EA, 258)

The imagery of the garden and its analogy with the process of becoming recalls the same in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Like Elizabeth von Arnim, Mrs Fisher is awakened into conscious being by a felicitous memory of childhood. Elizabeth von Arnim exposes the social codes of behaviour that dictate acceptable behaviour for elderly women. Mrs Fisher's soul begins to contradict these social expectations, and the tension between the two is keenly felt by her. She is glad she is with strangers at the castle rather than old friends who, in Mrs Fisher's experience, "compare one constantly with what one used to be. They are always doing it if one develops. They are surprised at development. They hark back; they expect motionlessness after, say, fifty, to the end of one's days" (EA, 261). Mrs Fisher perceives that this is condemning oneself to a premature death. She begins to see a progression in life of "development, change, ripening" (EA, 260). She feels uneasy because she feels she is on the brink of "unripening, going back to something green" (EA, 260). Eventually, however, Mrs Fisher is in no doubt that "she craved for the living, the developing,—the crystallised and *finished* wearied her" (EA, 357, emphasis added). Elizabeth's belief that a garden is never finished is analogous to the garden imagery signifying Mrs Fisher's awakening. The open-endedness of the garden at San Salvatore has begun to transform Mrs Fisher, moving her from the past to the present, and into an anticipation of the future.

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Caroline Dexter had come to San Salvatore “with the single intention of lying comatose for four weeks in the sun” (EA,127). After a short time, however, she finds herself desiring to consciously reflect upon the meaning of her life. Just as Berlin affected Elizabeth von Arnim negatively, so Caroline’s soul recognises the emptiness of her superficial social existence in London. Like Elizabeth von Arnim at Nassenheide, Caroline finds formal dinner times to be stifling, however, at San Salvatore, she has the freedom to escape out into the garden and so avoid the formal meals that Mrs Fisher initially presides over and deliberately prolongs.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth’s husband asks, “What would become of poetry if women became so sensible that they turned a deaf ear to the poetic platitudes of love?” (EGG, 139) The irony of this question is its subtext of the following question: What would become of *women* if they turned a deaf ear to the poetic platitudes of love within the context of the romance plot? Elizabeth and some of her female protagonists answer the question by beginning to demonstrate the process of becoming, as opposed to what Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, calls “a stale soul” (EGG, 167). In *The Enchanted April*, Caroline has resented the fact that all the men she has met have talked to her only in poetic platitudes. Men do not talk to or treat her as a fully human being. Caroline’s soul is hungry: “It was as though a healthy person with a normal hunger was given nothing whatever to eat but sugar” (EA, 153), she concluded. In *The Enchanted April*, as in Elizabeth von Arnim’s other writings, the romance plot is critiqued at a number of levels and shown to be lacking in nourishment and deeply unsatisfying.

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Rose and Lotty experience a new freedom in their souls and this triggers a transformation in their bodies. As the body has been a primary site of women's oppression, this is significant. Elizabeth von Arnim feels free enough to dance in her garden at Nassenheide (EGG, 2), and Rose and Lotty take their shoes and stockings off to paddle in the sea at the bottom of the hilltop garden. Both women agree that "their happiness was complete" (EA, 114) at San Salvatore. It is, therefore, paradoxical when, just as all four women are beginning to relax in themselves and with each other, delighting in this previously unknown felicitous space, that Rose and Lotty decide to send word to their husbands to join them. The agreement between the four women in London had been that each could invite one guest, however, all had wanted solitude at the time of departure. It is ironic that Lotty announces her decision only minutes after exclaiming "how difficult it is to be *improper* without men?" (EA, 176, emphasis added).

The word "proper" is used frequently in Elizabeth von Arnim's writing and has already been quoted in this thesis. The word is used subversively by Elizabeth von Arnim within the context of women's social construction. As Luce Irigaray suggests: "To speak as woman means to undo the reign of the 'proper'—the proper name, property, propriety. . . . [T]o evoke rather than designate, to overflow and exceed all boundaries and oppositions" (Irigaray, explained in Grosz 1989, 132). In her writing, Elizabeth von Arnim uses literary devices such as irony, "to undo the reign of the 'proper' ". Lotty and Rose had begun "to undo the reign of the 'proper' " in their creation of female-centred space at San Salvatore; this ceased with the arrival of the men.

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Mrs Fisher is not enthusiastic about the prospect of being joined by husbands: "Mr Fisher was dead; let him remain so. She had no wish to be told he was walking about the garden" (EA, 48). Caroline is incredulous about Lotty's decision and fears that when the men arrive she will be driven from her lovely top garden which, at present, she has to herself. She tells Lotty how much more space she has experienced since being at San Salvatore without family or friends. In replying to Caroline, Lotty makes the distinction between her family and her husband. She says that being without her husband is "as if one had no clothes on" (EA, 183). This directly contradicts her earlier statement that it is difficult to be improper without men. It also contradicts her ecstasy on arriving at San Salvatore, and especially her pleasure at sleeping alone. It also shows the narrator to be ironic when Lotty's initial felicitous response to San Salvatore is described as if "she . . . at once [flung] off all her garments . . . with a cry of rapture" (EA, 198). Rose is silent, as if in compliance with Lotty who has already told her that her desire has sprung from feeling "*flooded with love*" (EA, 171).

Both Rose and Lotty subconsciously seem to want to see if the romance plot can flourish in the romantic atmosphere of San Salvatore. However, as the female protagonist Gemma, in Fay Weldon's novel, *Words of Advice*, says: "It's just that love and romance and illusion and hope are etched so deeply into all our hearts that they can never be wiped away. They stay around to torment us with thoughts of what might have been" (Weldon 1978, 231). Both women desire to return to the early days of their own romance and marriage in order to make the ending match what they have

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been socially constructed to believe it was going to be.

The result is unconvincing, because through Elizabeth von Arnim's pervasive use of irony, she shows the romance plot to be fundamentally flawed in that it never reveals the reality of life for women beyond the "happily ever after" ending, which is the high cost to a woman of inequality, paralysis of becoming or, at worst, obliteration. Lotty and Rose feel compelled to give the romance plot another chance, despite the probability, at the end of the sun-filled month of April, of returning to the same oppressions they faced in rain-filled London.

A total of four men invade the felicitous space of the four women at San Salvatore: the gardener Domenico, the landlord Mr Briggs, and the two husbands. On the morning of the arrival of Mr Mellersh Wilkins, the women's space is confined still further: "All three had breakfast that day in their rooms, moved by a common instinct to take cover" (EA, 223). To be confined indoors has been established in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* to be oppressive. Suddenly, the whole house revolves around the arrival of one man. This is highlighted, dramatically, when Mr Wilkins, not understanding the operating instructions for the bath which were written in Italian, overheats the boiler which explodes while he was bathing. He rushes out of the bathroom, clad only in a towel, into the hallway, where he meets Caroline and Mrs Fisher for the first time.

That Mr Wilkins's bathing experience takes up nine pages of the novel is symbolic of the space he is now occupying. His cigar smoke soon competes



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with the delicate scents of the flowers, thus symbolizing a contrast between patriarchal space and female-centred space. On one occasion, Mrs Fisher rounds a corner and takes him by surprise and Mr Wilkins knowing her dislike of the smoke, throws the cigar into a vase of lilies: "It got caught in the lilies and smoked on by itself among them" (EA, 245), as if to symbolize his polluting, patriarchal, intrusive presence among the women. However, ironically, Mrs Fisher generally enjoys the presence of the men: "there was no doubt what ever in Mrs Fisher's mind that a man was infinitely preferable as a companion to a woman" (EA, 236). Although having experienced a new sense of felicity with the absence of men, Mrs Fisher continues to identify more with patriarchal space than female-centred space.

In travelling to San Salvatore, the women had, in effect, moved to the boundary of patriarchal space and created a new female-centred space and time which had become the centre of their world. However, the space where "it is difficult to be improper without men" is now destroyed by the arrival of Mr Wilkins. The bath incident, including the semi-naked appearance of Mr Willkins, is symbolic of the male-centred space now overwhelming the female-centred space experienced by the women prior to his arrival.

It is ironic that Mr Wilkins has come to the castle, not sharing Lotty's romantic sentiment, but rather to further his business prospects. His hope was that Lady Caroline and her wealthy family, as well as the other women present, might consider him in the future as their solicitor. He feels amiable towards Lotty because she is on this occasion, in contrast with previous

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occasions, a means to this end. He had also heard of Caroline's beauty. Elizabeth von Arnim describes, with irony, the transformation that Lotty perceives is occurring in Wilkins: Lotty marvels at her husband's "rapidly developing affectionateness" (EA, 254) when, in the second week, he sometimes pinched both her ears instead of just one. This language parodies the discourse of the romance plot.

Lotty's value to her husband is primarily in terms of her ability to further his career, and she had previously been a liability to him in this respect. The only transformation that he observes in Lotty, at San Salvatore, is in this area of helpfulness to him. He charms the other women to the point where Rose wonders whether San Salvatore would also transform her husband. After initially delighting in solitude at San Salvatore, she now begins to feel unhappy spending time alone and "longed to feel important to somebody again" (EA, 274-5). Ironically, Rose can only feel important within the context of the romance plot: a narrative of dominance (by the man), and submission (to him by the woman). Despite the space and freedom to experience her "real and natural self" (SS,149) in the gardens of San Salvatore, and to taste a sense of autonomy, Rose's perception of her identity still remains centred in relationship to a man. Paradoxically, she invites her husband at a time when she is feeling a sense of "lack," yet the environment of San Salvatore is demonstrating "excess".

The economy of commerce and expedience, of quantity rather than quality, that is demonstrated by Mellersh Wilkins is contrasted with another

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economy represented by descriptions of an expansive, sensory aliveness able to be savoured by the women at San Salvatore with “its excess of life” (EA, 109). This excess is manifested in the abundance and quality of beauty, colour, fragrance and variety pouring forth in profusion. These are the same contrasting economies that have been associated in this thesis with those of Elizabeth and her husband, the Man of Wrath, that Elizabeth von Arnim describes in her autobiographical writings. One economy belongs to patriarchal space; the other belongs to female-centred space. Here is one such passage of the latter in *The Enchanted April* demonstrating this excess of life, as opposed to restriction and constriction of life represented by Mellerish Wilkins:

In the second week the scent of beanfields in flower on the hillside behind the village came across to San Salvatore whenever the air moved. In the garden. . . the poet's eyed narcissus disappeared out of the long grass at the edge of the zigzag path, and wild gladiolus, slender and rose-coloured, came in their stead. . . . Such a jumble of spring and summer was not to be believed in, except by those who dwelt in those gardens. Everything seemed to be out together,—all the things crowded into one month which in England are spread penuriously over six.  
(EA, 269-270)

The next male to appear is the owner of San Salvatore, Mr Thomas Briggs. He comes on the pretext of seeing that everything is to their satisfaction. He had been attracted to Rose when he met her in London and wanted to see her again. He longed to see her in his house as her background, to see her sitting in his chairs, drinking out of his cups . . .” (EA, 280). He can only imagine her as an extension of his possessions and his identity. Briggs is

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looking for a wife and is under the impression that Mrs Arbuthnot is a widow, but when he sets eyes on Caroline he pursues her and forgets Rose. At this point, “[a] deep melancholy invaded [Caroline]” (EA, 302). She has already been pursued by Dominico, the gardener who watered and tied up the plants that were nearest to her. He talked continually to her while he worked. She is then forced to move to the other side of the garden, but he watches her every movement with the adoration she has come to dread: “She kept her eyes shut, because then he would think she wanted to sleep and would go away” (EA, 126). In shutting her eyes, Caroline deprives her Self of the fullness of her sensory perceptions that Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, to be an important dimension of the pleasure of experiencing felicitous space. Instead of being free to extend her gaze and her boundaries, Caroline creates an enclosure in an attempt to protect her Self.

Caroline fears that Briggs will continue to haunt her, both at San Salvatore and later when she returns to London:

She would have liked to stay out longer, to go to her corner behind the daphne bushes and look at the sunset sky and watch the lights coming out one by one in the village below and smell the sweet moistness of the evening, but if she did Mr Briggs would certainly follow her.  
(EA, 307)

Caroline is forced indoors and Briggs follows her there too. For Caroline this is “the old familiar tyranny” (EA, 307) and she wonders when it will end.

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She tries "to sound detached and forbidding, but with little hope of success" (EA, 309). Caroline's social construction has produced an incongruity between her behaviour and her feelings. Caroline compares how she feels when she is with Briggs, to her experience of Lotty's company, in which she feels "free, and yet befriended" (EA, 311). Caroline desired to be out in the cool garden, not her bedroom that was hot with the afternoon sun. She became angry that her boundaries had been so diminished and she felt trapped. In desperation, she ran out "to the sheltering trees of the zigzag path . . ." (EA, 312). Her moments of felicitous space are short lived before, once again, she feels engulfed.

Caroline's space is further confined by the appearance of an English male writer with the pseudonym of Ferdinand Arundel, whom Caroline had met previously in London. She does not know that he is Frederick Arbuthnot, the husband of Rose. Caroline's mother had told him where she was, and Caroline feels betrayed when she discovers this. By the time her husband arrives, Rose is glowing with the brief attention that Briggs has given her. She "was quite certain she had been pretty; she saw it in Mr Briggs's eyes as clearly as in a looking glass. For a brief space, she thought, she had been like a torpid fly brought back to gay buzzing by the lighting of a fire in a wintry room" (EA, 323). Unlike Elizabeth, whose sense of being is sourced within her soul, Rose's sense of being comes from either a man's acceptance or a male god's acceptance of her. In her room, "she stuck a crimson camellia in her hair down by her ear. . . but she took it out again with a smile and a sigh and put it in the *proper* place for flowers, which is water" (EA, 324, emphasis added). Rose's constructedness, shown by the word "proper," is stronger than

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the voice of her soul.

Rose believes romantic love to be the answer to her happiness. When she sees her husband on his arrival at San Salvatore she mistakenly thinks him to have come because he wanted to be with her. Her immediate affection overwhelms him to the point where he forgets Caroline.

The narrator's description of the evening of Frederick Arbuthnot's arrival is ironic, because the space of San Salvatore is now ambiguous. The garden space is described as lyrically as it was before the men intruded into it:

That evening was the evening of the full moon. The garden was an enchanted place where all the flowers seemed white. The lilies, the daphnes, the orange-blossom, the white stocks, the white pinks, the white roses—you could see these as plainly as in the daytime; but the coloured flowers existed only as fragrance.  
(EA,344)

This description recalls Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth in Her German Garden*, when she describes the white mass of cherry blossoms making the garden look like a wedding. However, the similar description in *The Enchanted April* is juxtaposed with the romance plot, and assumes a background for heterosexual romance, instead of the female-centred space of the garden on the boundary of patriarchal space which the German garden was for Elizabeth, and the Italian garden had been, but was no longer, for the women.

After dinner, the women sat outside in "the huge cool calm of outside"

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(EA, 345), and the men stayed indoors smoking around the dining table. These divisions of space are similar to those in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Like Elizabeth's husband, Mr Wilkins "preferred rooms and fires after dark to gardens and moonlight" (EA, 257). For Elizabeth von Arnim, "the garden is the place [she goes] for refuge and shelter, not the house" (EGG, 33). The two contrasting spaces are representative of the economy of Elizabeth's felicitous outdoor space and Count von Arnim's economy of restrictive, infelicitous indoors space.

Lotty, however, now attributes all transformations effected at San Salvatore to "Love". She thinks that "Love" is responsible for Rose's radiant beauty. The significance that the space of San Salvatore has been for the women is now denied by Lotty. She says to Caroline, "Perhaps you could tell me of anything else in the world that works such wonders" (EA, 345). Caroline "couldn't tell her; and if she could have, what a night to begin arguing in. This was a night for—" (EA, 346). There is no space in which Caroline can articulate a counterview of the romance plot, since the patriarchal space represented by the romance plot is engulfing the female-centred space. Caroline can now only silently resist the ideology of romance as presented to her by Lotty, in her conscious mind: She knew that love "also worked inverted wonders, it didn't invariably, as she well knew, transfigure people into saints and angels. Grievously indeed did it sometimes do the opposite" (EA, 347). Caroline is consciously recalling in her mind, her own socially illegitimated experience of love which contradicts the romance plot.

Caroline wanted to use the experience of San Salvatore to resolve some

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inner conflicts that have inhibited the development of her identity. She discovered she wanted to find the meaning of her life and "to perhaps make something of herself after all" (EA, 125). For this, Caroline had chosen an environment without men, where solitude was possible. The romance plot negates her desire to make something of herself. Caroline begins to feel the cultural mandate to be part of a couple. Elizabeth von Arnim reveals the pressure put upon unmarried women to fulfil the romance plot. It is deeply ironical that Lotty, who chose San Salvatore to escape her husband, should coerce Caroline into the romance plot.

Prior to the men arriving, Caroline had begun the process of becoming and was feeling empowered. The romance plot now begins to make her feel less than she was before: "small and dreadfully alone . . . uncovered and defenceless" (EA, 346). She moves away from Lotty with whom she can no longer relate, and returns to her favourite corner of the garden, extending her gaze across the sea to France. This movement towards France represents a desire to escape from the present situation; to broaden her trajectory which seemed to be rapidly narrowing and to create another felicitous space in which to continue her becoming. She is feeling, as a woman, "the effect of being formed by social constraints that compel an individual commitment to one path" (Du Plessis 1985, 90). For women, this path has been a no-exit one to marriage.

The garden of San Salvatore, with its many levels and paths, is now inaccessible to Caroline because of the presence of the men. Elizabeth von



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Arnim shows the construction and ideology of the romance plot to be overarching any alternative paths for Caroline. Her space in the garden is invaded by Rose's husband, who seeks Caroline out to thank her for not revealing he had come to San Salvatore to see her. He informs her that she has "behaved exactly as a man would have behaved to his friend" (EA, 350). He tells her that "'it's the rarest, most precious of combinations . . . to be a woman and have the loyalty of a man'" (EA, 350). It is ironic that Caroline thinks "these were indeed handsome compliments" (EA, 350), not realising that they were statements of misogyny and polarized gender hierarchies.

In her mind, Caroline now commences a downward spiral of depreciation which descends to the abject. Her *enforced* marginalization now becomes disempowering for her, in comparison with the empowerment of her *chosen* marginalization at San Salvatore before the men arrived. Lotty's emphasis on romance and marriage has divided Caroline against herself. Placing herself within the context of the romance plot, Caroline defines herself as "a sour, a suspicious, and a selfish spinster" (EA, 348). From her newly discovered felicitous space, she "might, she thought, have turned out a quite decent generous minded, kindly human being" (EA, 348). In female-centred space she had begun to experience her full humanity. The romance plot, however, denies her full humanity because it is constructed as a gender hierarchy, with the woman submitting to the man who is dominant.

Caroline, in her state of depreciation, profusely thanks Briggs for time spent in his castle and gardens, and concludes her debt of gratitude by telling him he is "worth fifty of her" (EA, 354). Virginia Woolf wrote, ironically, that

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"Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Woolf 1977, 35). Elizabeth von Arnim shows through her texts that the romance plot diminishes women - often to the extent that they feel as if they are actually disappearing. Elizabeth von Arnim uses various descriptions of animals and insects to symbolize, in a perjorative sense, how her female characters feel and rate themselves, when in male-centred space, in comparison to the male characters.

At the end of *The Enchanted April*, the impression is given of Caroline and Briggs becoming romantically involved. It is Lotty who gives this impression, when the text reads: " 'I see them being the Briggses,' finished Mrs Wilkins" (EA, 360) to her husband. This quotation has a number of layers of signification. Firstly, Briggs and Caroline have only just met. Caroline really wants solitude, not the presence of Mr Briggs. Lotty, in seeing them married, is reflecting her own wish fulfilment of the romance plot, rather than Caroline's. That she sees Caroline becoming a "Briggs," negates the whole purpose of Caroline going to San Salvatore. Secondly, after Lotty's exclamation, the narrator uses the phrase "finished Mrs Wilkins". This suggests that once Caroline marries Briggs it will be a conclusion for Caroline in terms of her trajectory of Self development.

Thirdly, another implication of the phraseology might be that "Mrs Wilkins" is now "finished," since she has chosen the romance plot in preference to her own space and development. In London, Lotty and Rose

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were known by their married names. In the felicitous space of San Salvatore, they are called, and call each other by their first names and this symbolizes their burgeoning awareness of the separateness of their existence - apart from their husbands. However, at the end of the novel, the narrator returns to calling Lotty "Mrs Wilkins," and this symbolizes Lotty's loss of autonomy and return to patriarchal space.

The previous quotation precedes the final paragraph in *The Enchanted April*. It is the last of a succession of sensual descriptions of the week by week luxuriant unfolding and flowering of the trees, plants and flowers during the stay. It reads:

To lie under an acacia tree that last week and look up through the branches at its frail leaves and white flowers quivering against the blue of the sky, while the least movement of the air shook down their scent, was a great happiness. Indeed, the whole garden dressed itself gradually towards the end in white and grew more and more scented.  
(EA, 361)

This passage recalls a similar one in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, where Elizabeth describes her garden as looking like a wedding with masses of white cherry blossoms (EGG, 3), and later admits that her heart felt vows, however, are to nature rather than marriage (EGG, 8).

However, the passage in *The Enchanted April* has a significantly different tone and effect from the one in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* because the context is *within* the romance plot, rather than - in Elizabeth's

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case - *outside* of it. So that the garden dressing itself gradually in white, towards the end of *The Enchanted April*, seems symbolic of a bride's gown and the impending closure that marriage represents. The garden at San Salvatore, is no longer a symbol of female-centred felicitous space, as first represented by the garden at Nassenheide in Elizabeth von Arnim's writing. This results in a disjunction which is felt between the narrative discourse of felicitous female-centred space and the romance plot resolution that signifies infelicitous male dominated space. The tone and effect, therefore, is ironic.

The last words of the novel describe how when the men and women left San Salvatore "they could still could smell the acacias" (EA, 361). The tone is ironic since it leads this reader to ask the question: Would they still be able to smell the acacias in the rain and smog of London? Elizabeth von Arnim shows how the pervasive social narrative encapsulated in the romance plot makes it difficult for a woman to resist trying to live out the plot.

The men seem out of place at San Salvatore, just as Elizabeth von Arnim's husband and her gardeners were a negative force in the garden at Nassenheide. Mr Wilkins and Mr Arbuthnot are blind to the intense natural beauty of the gardens and surrounding landscape of San Salvatore because, like Elizabeth's husband, they are not interested in that which, potentially, they can not own or exploit. In this context, they are not, however, blind to Caroline's beauty since, as an unmarried woman, she is considered to be sexually available. Wilkins values women primarily in terms of their furthering his wealth and career. Rose reminds Briggs of a Madonna painting, and so treats her like an icon - objectifying her, rendering her

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passive and powerless.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim describes two opposing cultures: that of female-centred space and that of patriarchal space. In *The Enchanted April* she further develops this sense of two incompatible cultures, as she does in the rest of her writing. She shows how the dominant male culture with its limited economy, symbolized by London and its rain, is constructed upon the maintenance of power, control and ownership, whereas the woman-centred culture of the garden encompasses a felicitous, open-handed way of living.

In *The Solitary Summer*, Elizabeth rhetorically asks her husband: "Wouldn't it be perfect to get up every morning for weeks and feel that you belong to yourself and to nobody else?" (SS, 5). This is ironic, since her husband could not contemplate anything other than doing just that, and this is legitimated for him by patriarchy. Whereas what Elizabeth is imagining in terms of an alternative, autonomous identity, is not legitimated for her by patriarchy. When Lotty first awakens at San Salvatore she recognises and experiences the freedom of belonging to her Self. However, by inviting her husband to San Salvatore, she effectively confined her time and space for developing a sense of autonomy. Since she has been unable to protect and maintain the space she originally created at San Salvatore, on returning to London she will find herself trapped, once again, by the same oppressions without consciously understanding their implications.

Lotty is the catalyst for the escape by the women to Italy, yet she is also the

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one to sabotage the felicitous space enjoyed by the women without the men. Lotty allows herself a taste of felicitous space, but she does not name it fully, or validate it to a point where, like Elizabeth von Arnim, she can understand the vital significance of it.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim shows that she perceives and understands the illusion of the romance plot, and in doing so, she is able to fulfil her desire that “[her] soul may have time to grow” (SS, 1). Research has shown that it is difficult for contemporary women to shed the illusion of the romance plot from their psyche, let alone recognise its illusion.<sup>2</sup> *The Enchanted April* shows how difficult it is for a woman, even with the initiative that Lotty and Rose demonstrated to begin with, to maintain protective boundaries in the best interests of her body and soul.

*The Enchanted April* presents a compromise of felicitous space, in contrast to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *The Solitary Summer* and *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen* where Elizabeth created, protected, and maintained felicitous space on a conscious level. Considering the layers of complex signification in *The Enchanted April*, it is ironic that Terence de Vere White, in his introduction to the 1986 Virago edition of *The Enchanted April*, likens the novel to “the lightest of omeletes, in the making of which the least possible number of eggs get broken [and that] only an incorrigible pedant would try to judge it at a deeper level” (EA, vii). The framework and concepts of feminist literary theory applied to the analysis of this novel, make

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<sup>2</sup> Kay Mussell points out in *Fantasy and Reconciliation*, that for many women, “autonomous choices may have consequences that they find disquieting or unacceptable” (190-191).

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it possible to see beyond such superficial conclusions which are synonymous with androcentrism.

## 4

### The Willows: The English Garden

*To be born a woman has been to be born,  
within an allotted and confined space, into the  
keeping of men.* —JOHN BERGER

*He envelops her in walls whereas he envelops  
himself in her flesh, and envelops his things  
with it. . . . [V]isibly limiting, sheltering but  
risking being imprisoning and murderous, if  
the threshold is not open.* —LUCE IRIGARAY

Of all her novels, *Vera* is Elizabeth von Arnim's severest indictment on the institution of marriage and her most obvious subversion of the romance plot. The novel represents a description of the experience of the traditional romance plot for one woman in her particular circumstances of oppression. Of all Elizabeth von Arnim's female protagonists, Lucy is the one who is least able to create for herself a female-centred felicitous space for the protection and nourishment of both her body and soul.

The fact that *Vera* - a work of fiction - was published anonymously is significant, because it was considered to interanimate with her life as lived by people who knew both Elizabeth von Arnim and Francis, Earl Russell.



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When the novel was published, her husband's brother, Bertrand Russell "read *Vera*, with mounting horror, so exact was the depiction of his brother" (Usborne 1986, 233). Her husband, Francis, Earl Russell was angry when he read the novel and subsequently threatened a libel action (Usborne 1986, 235). Elizabeth's response in her personal diary was to write, "If he does sue me, I shall simply go into the witness box and say, "Of course it's not Francis!" (quoted in Usborne 1986, 235). Elizabeth von Arnim was confident she could defend herself knowing that she had the protection of fiction, as well as the knowledge that her husband could not face the publicity associated with the court case.

There is a noticable silence in her autobiographical writings regarding the extreme oppression that she experienced in her second marriage to Francis, Earl Russell. In *All The Dogs of My Life* she describes his courting of her, together with his intention of marriage, as giving her a feeling of impending "Doom" (D of L, 118). However, in the same autobiography, there is a silence between the beginning of the marriage and when she finally separates from him.

The implication of Elizabeth von Arnim's writing of *Vera* for her sense of Self was that she was able to legitimately record the circumstances of an oppressive relationship that she herself had experienced. Having been Other in her marital relationship, she now turned that concept around, and named her husband as Other, writing about the experience of the marriage from her own perspective. This was, for her, a liberatory process, and through it she

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was better able to reflect on, and understand the machinations of oppression with the distance of the fictional mode. In describing the writing process of *Vera* she noted in her personal diary that “it was extracted from [her] by torment” (Hardie 1982, v). Despite the torment, the exorcism effected by the intense writing experience of such an unrelentful infelicitous space brought her further on her path of becoming.

There are various modes of autobiographical acts which all have an element of the fictional to a greater or lesser extent. As Carolyn Heilbrun suggests in *Writing a Woman's Life*: “[T]he woman herself may tell [her life] in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction” (quoted in Walker 1990, 3). These are the major writing modes that Elizabeth von Arnim used to write her Self into her text and thereby animate her text with her life.

The novel *Vera* has been included in this thesis because of the contrast it provides with Elizabeth von Arnim's other writings. In *Vera*, there is little contrast between felicitous and infelicitous space intratextually, since the novel can be described as an almost continuous infelicitous space. This is because very early on in the novel the female protagonist, Lucy, cedes her existence completely to Wemyss, the male protagonist, and that reality has not changed by the end of the novel.

At a time of extreme vulnerability - immediately following the death of her father which left her without either parent - Lucy's life is invaded by a

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widower called Everard Wemyss who describes himself as "a respectable British business man" (V, 128). He proceeds to isolate, control and imprison her. At the beginning of the novel, Lucy is standing in the garden of the house where she and her father had been holidaying. The house stands on top of a cliff in Cornwall. The position of the house is symbolic since Lucy is poised in a position of grave danger to her soul and body. Her father has died suddenly, three hours ago. In a state of shock, she leans on the garden gate and stares out to sea. Her senses are numbed and her vulnerability is emphasised by the image of the sun beating down on her bare head (V, 1). Lucy's stream of consciousness reveals a father and daughter relationship that had manifested itself more as one of co-dependent lovers: "There was no room for any other thought so completely did he fill her heart. . . . She had not been a day away from him for years; she had had no wish to go away. Where and with who could she be so happy as with him?" (V, 2). Lucy's memories of happiness are all connected to an identification with her father's pleasures, interests, and friends in intellectual circles. Her happiness has been dependant upon his and, although her father was kind and respectful to her, nevertheless, her reality had been completely dominated by his.

Lucy experiences the shock and detachment of the initial stage of grief and is "unconnected with herself" (V, 4) when a man - unknown to Lucy. - passes along the cliff road in front of the garden gate. Everard Wemyss <sup>1</sup> is twenty years older than she is. The meeting is entirely initiated by him. Lucy, in her

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<sup>1</sup> He is introduced and called Wemyss for much of the novel. This is perhaps an attempt, on the part of Elizabeth von Arnim, to defamiliarize the person of her husband that Wemyss represents, and so create ironic distance between herself and Francis, Earl Russell.

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grief, is "miles away from him" (V, 8), and this seems ironic, since he is so close physically to her with only the gate between them.

At this crucial point in the novel, Lucy has boundaries, and the potential of "shelter and refuge" (EGG, 33) that the garden could offer, if she recognised this to be so. Wemyss requests entry into the garden using the pretext of needing a glass of water. Unaccustomed to protecting her soul and body space, Lucy fails to act on her immediate intuitive knowledge of him. She senses that "[h]e was like some elemental force in his directness. He had the quality of an irresistible natural phenomenon" (V, 8), yet she fails to repel him. In response to his request for water, she tells him that if her father had not died that day she would have obliged him. This information, rather than causing Wemyss to respect her wish to be alone, makes him more determined to enter her space. In a matter of moments she allows him "to [cover] her hands with one of his, and with the other he unlatched the gate and walked in" (V, 9). This is a forewarning of his taking advantage of any weakness either in Lucy already, or created in Lucy by Wemyss throughout the novel.

In her failure to act on her intuition regarding Wemyss due to her grief, Lucy passively lets him enter her garden. She then asks herself a question: "What did it matter whether she sat under the mulberry tree or stood at the gate?" (V, 10) This leads the reader into sensing that the distance between the gate and mulberry tree matters very much in terms of representing further boundaries and space that Lucy is conceding.

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Concerned only with his own reality and problems, Wemyss negates her reality by egocentrically saying that once she had understood his suffering, her own would seem less. He then proceeds to tell her of the circumstances surrounding his wife's recent death. The inquest found the cause of death to be either an accident or suicide. As he tells her the story, "he began stripping the leaves off the branches above his head" (V, 18). Violating the garden in this way foreshadows the violation of Lucy's body and soul, and is suggestive of some act of violence on his part, towards his dead wife. His violation of the garden suggests that the potential felicitous space of the garden, as experienced by Elizabeth von Arnim and the women at San Salvatore, will be much less accessible to Lucy. She continually denies the reality of her feelings about Wemyss, telling herself that "grotesque things" (V, 12) happen only in dreams. He soon gains her sympathy, and when Lucy lays her hand on his he seizes it, and a short time later "hurt her hand, he gripped it so hard" (V, 15). Wemyss is, very obviously, not grieving for his wife, and is only angry and upset for the inconvenience and disturbance his wife's death has caused him. This knowledge, gleaned by the reader but not by Lucy, foreshadows the more extensive oppression that Lucy will experience in the future with Wemyss.

The constant foreshadowing contributes to the increasingly dark tone of the novel. Throughout her writings, Elizabeth von Arnim describes "the webs of patriarchal power and a range of feminine voices and subject positions which support and resist them" (Weedon 1987, 155). In the character of Lucy, Elizabeth von Arnim has created a female subject position that *continually* fails to resist the webs of patriarchal power of which Chris Weedon speaks.

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Wemyss takes over the organisation of the funeral arrangements in an attempt to isolate Lucy from her father's friends and her aunt, Miss Dot Entwhistle, who comes to stay with Lucy. He takes every opportunity to increase her dependence upon him. The garden continues to be the setting for the entrapment of Lucy by Wemyss. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth's wilderness garden is her refuge and shelter from her husband and his expectations of her indoors. Lucy regards Wemyss as her "refuge and shelter in the wilderness" (V, 51), and, in the light of this contrasting interanimation, Lucy's choice of refuge and shelter seems ironical and suspect. She is, however, disturbed when he begins to be physically intimate with her so soon after his wife's death. However, Wemyss emotionally manipulates her into acquiescence with his fast mood changes that have the effect of confusing and bewildering her. The mood changes are dependent upon whether or not Lucy acquiesces to his desires. The effect of having given away her physical boundaries results in her feeling psychologically that "she was engulfed" (V, 54). The word, "engulfed," signifies the infelicitous space of patriarchal enclosure, and foreshadows her future incarceration by Wemyss.

The garden is now described as "darkening" (V, 55), and this intensifies the increasingly dark tone of the text. Securing his engulfment of Lucy, Wemyss insists on their becoming engaged within a week of her father's death. It worries her that he can think of love and marriage so soon after his wife's sudden death. If Lucy had insisted upon more time and space for herself in which to reflect and see more clearly, she may well have been able

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to resist Wemyss. However, "while she was with him he overpowered her into a torpor, into a shutting of her eyes and her thought, into just giving herself . . . to the blessedness of a soothed and caressed semi-consciousness"(V, 57). The cover of the 1983 Virago publication of *Vera* appropriately shows a portrait of a young woman with her eyes shut, her head bowed down with elaborate hair ornaments, some of which appear like screw attachments, with chains hanging from them. This portrait is symbolic of the control and domination that Wemyss consistently and deliberately exercises over Lucy's conscious mind and her acquiescence in her own oppression.

Unlike Lucy, her Aunt Dot begins to perceive Wemyss as predatory and she is sure that "his way of courting would not be vegetarian" (V, 84). Wemyss in turn dislikes her more intensely as "it was gradually being borne in on him that she really existed, on her own account, independently. She asserted herself. Even when she wasn't saying anything . . ." (V, 71). Wemyss knows however, that Lucy does not exist on her own account, independently and that is why he has chosen her. Concerned that her aunt may influence Lucy, Wemyss tells Lucy she must be simple, not complicated like her aunt. The ironic voice of the narrator is felt when Lucy replies that she believes she is too simple. For Wemyss, "there was only one point of view . . . and that was the right one" (V, 95). Initially, this refreshing quality of simplicity that Lucy attributes to Wemyss "had the effect on her of a window being thrown open and fresh air and sunlight being let in, [as he seemed] so healthy and natural" (V, 100). In other texts of Elizabeth von Arnim, an open window

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and sunlight symbolizes the yearning for, or anticipation of felicitous female-centred space without the presence of men.

Wemyss persuades Lucy that "a woman didn't want this endless thinking and examining and dissecting and considering" (V, 95). Lucy begins, very rapidly, to internalize the voice of her oppressor, which is shown by the words, "her very thoughts were . . . dressed in Wemyss's words" (V, 95). In her grief, she is lured by what seems to her a promise of emotional comfort and Lucy agrees to marry him. The more people try to dissuade her against marrying Wemyss, the more determined she becomes until, ironically, "right inside her innermost soul . . . she was smiling to herself" (V, 104). At this point her conscious mind which is controlled by Wemyss, is now practically controlling her subconscious mind.

It is this control of Lucy's mind, as well as her belief in the ideology of the romance plot that causes Lucy to view Wemyss as superior to herself - not only as her lover, but as "a guide she could follow and a teacher she could look up to" (V, 104). However, in conflict with this image of superiority is, paradoxically, the image she has of him being a baby, alternately manifesting contentment or distress depending upon the adequacy of his demands being met. Lucy also sees herself as having rescued him from the grief of his wife's death, however, the irony is that she cannot rescue herself. This is partly because she cannot see beyond the "happy ending" of the romance plot, even when her experience is plainly showing her otherwise.



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The novel *Vera* exposes the ideology of the romance plot and magnifies it to grotesque proportions. On their honeymoon, for instance, the ideology of the marriage plot divides Lucy within herself, and presents her with intensely uncomfortable contradictions and tensions. She recalls that Wemyss told her early in their engagement how she, as his wife, should regard him as a husband:

Tell him your innermost thoughts, whatever they may be. . . .  
He is you. You and he are one in mind and soul now, and  
when he is your husband you and he will become perfect and  
complete by being one in body as well. . . . We shan't know  
where one ends and the other begins. That, little Love, is real  
marriage.  
(V, 139)

She had thought this to be "an ideal happiness, to be for ever removed from the fear of loneliness by the simple expedient of being doubled . . . " (V, 139). This is ironic, since marriage to Wemyss causes Lucy to feel diminished in her singularity. She also begins to feel very sleepy and yet she is unable to sleep at night. This is because Wemyss was demanding to the point where Lucy "felt too tired sometimes to get the ecstasy she quickly got to know was expected of her into her voice" (V, 128). Typical of one who is oppressed, she discovers that "[h]er thoughts mustn't wander . . . her thoughts were to be his as well as all the rest of her" (V, 129). If she contradicted him or his desire she inevitably "sat like a beggar in patient distress, waiting for him to emerge and be kind to her" (V, 142). Questions regarding her desire or preference are "only decorative" (V, 142). Lucy had taken space and time for rest and

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reflection in her life for granted prior to the advent of Wemyss. Now she consoles herself by hoping that after the honeymoon she will have some space when their daily routine will separate them. In delaying her gratification until later, Lucy sets up a mode of behaviour that ensures she will not be able to recognise the validity of female-centred space for herself.

On her honeymoon, Lucy "learned that Wemyss's mind was always made up. There seemed no moment when it was in *the process of becoming*" (V, 142, emphasis added). It is interesting that Elizabeth von Arnim seems to have had an awareness of some of the important concepts of contemporary literary theory. Her awareness of the concept of "social construction" has already been mentioned. Lucy, on the contrary, has no concept of the process of becoming, so it is the narrator that makes this observation about Wemyss. Lucy considers herself to have become "extremely abject" and thinks that "[l]ove had made her so" (V, 143). Julia Kristeva describes abjection as "an abyss at the borders of the subject's existence, a hole into which the subject may fall when its identity is put into question . . ." (explained in Grosz 1989, 72). The dark images of the cliff top garden and the garden at The Willows, as well as the dark tone of the novel are analogous with the dark abyss of which Kristeva speaks, into which Lucy falls when her identity is ceded to Wemyss's. In this context, the familiar expression of the discourse of romantic love, "*falling in love*," takes on sinister proportions for a woman. Lucy mistakenly supposes that it was fear of hurting the beloved that made her abject. She puts it down to the "nature" of love - that is - according to the romance plot, which as Chris Weedon states, "encourages women to identify

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themselves with masochistic forms of femininity and to find pleasure in doing so" (Weedon, 1987: 170). Lucy admits to herself that she is not happy, but goes to great lengths to justify her unhappiness, reciting to herself the discourse of romantic thralldom in order to fit herself into the marriage plot which is centred in male dominated space. Her justification always follows a predictable pattern involving blaming herself and excusing her husband. This has the effect of reinforcing her belief in being responsible for guilt as in the biblical myth of the Fall and the subsequent atonement required by women for Eve's "sin" as has been explained in Chapter One. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth continually refuses guilt (EGG, 16) in her claiming of female-centred space. In her text, Elizabeth von Arnim subverts the biblical myth of the Fall by, as it were, placing Eve without Adam in paradise, and "entering into [her] kingdom" (EGG, 8).

After the honeymoon, Lucy returns to The Willows, the house in the English countryside where Wemyss's wife, Vera, had committed suicide by throwing herself from a balcony, although her cause of death is unspoken and denied between them. Lucy has dreaded returning here. She wants to live elsewhere but Wemyss insists and accuses Lucy of being morbid. They are to sleep in the same marital bed that Wemyss and Vera slept in. Through inner monologue, the reader hears Lucy's soul in conflict with the tyranny of Wemyss. When Wemyss tells her that she will like the view from her sitting room at The Willows, "she naturally wanted to cry out that she wouldn't, and ask him how he could suppose she would like, what was to her, a view for ever associated with death?" (V, 143). (Vera fell from the window of the

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sitting room.) However, in the next breath of her inner monologue she is decrying herself for what Wemyss has termed, "diseased thinking" (V, 143).

Wemyss, in effect, forces her to walk the path that Vera walked. Unlike Elizabeth in the garden at Nassenheide, Vera was unable to make any new paths for herself at The Willows. There is only the one path that Wemyss prescribes for his wives: the path of absolute subservience and obedience to himself and his desires. Lucy fears that she will see Vera's face in the mirror instead of her own. This is because she has no sense of an autonomous self, and this produces a symbolic type of identification with Vera. On a subconscious level, Lucy knows she is travelling the same route as Vera.

Elizabeth von Arnim effectively shows how women can internalize the consciousness of the oppressor and consequently become divided within themselves, unable to adequately act or speak with their own voice. With the exception of Lucy, the female protagonists in Elizabeth von Arnim's novels discussed in this thesis, to a greater or lesser degree, seek to redress this imbalance of power and contradiction by the creation of felicitous space. Through the character of Lucy, Elizabeth von Arnim shows that a woman's struggle for felicitous space can involve elaborate inner complexes that negate her needs and desires. Because Lucy does not value her self, but merges her identity with Wemyss's through what she mistakenly hopes is love, she is unable to recognise her need for felicitous space. As Elizabeth von Arnim writes in *In the Mountains*: "How can you see anything if your nose is right up against it?" (I M, 18) Naming one's world needs a degree of

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distance from one's oppression.

The Willows is the house where Lucy allows her body and soul to be incarcerated by Wemyss. The pervasive irony of the text creates a refrain for the reader from either judging Lucy harshly, or pitying her as a "victim". The detachment of irony would have allowed Elizabeth von Arnim the freedom to reflect constructively rather than destructively, on how she came to relinquish the autonomy and freedom of widowhood that she had experienced and enjoyed before marrying Francis, Earl Russell. However, there is a sense of fate and a lack of agency or responsibility expressed by Elizabeth von Arnim about her own choice of both her husbands in *All the Dogs of My Life*, just as Lucy, in *Vera*, expresses the same in her stream of (un)consciousness.

On arriving at The Willows, the imagination of Lucy's soul paints an image of warning for her: The house of red brick was "in its exposed position unhidden by any trees, a great splotch of vivid red in the landscape" (V, 148), which made Lucy think of blood. Lucy is immediately ashamed of this thought, because she intuitively knows that Vera has committed suicide, and Lucy knew if Wemyss could read her mind, he would have made her feel the shame of her judgement in its reflection upon himself. In contrast to the garden at Nassenheide, with its many large sheltering protective trees and secluded corners, Wemyss's garden is totally exposed like the stark confines of a "concentration" death camp. Round the edge of the garden are iron railings, and a fringe of willows<sup>2</sup> concealing wire netting. Lucy will never

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<sup>2</sup> The willow is a tree that is often associated with death.

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be able to hide from any human gaze from the house. She discovers that the garden is as hostile a space as inside the house. In terms of the garden as a metaphor for female-centred space and becoming, *Vera* is the one contradictory text of those discussed in this thesis.

Lucy never spends time in the garden unless Wemyss is present. There is only one garden path at The Willows, symbolizing a lack of alternatives for Lucy. This contrasts with the many new paths that Elizabeth von Arnim created at Nassenheide. The path is too narrow for Lucy and Wemyss to walk side by side and Wemyss always walks ahead. The weather is always cold, wet and windy at The Willows, as if to intensify the feeling of infelicitous space that it represents for Lucy. In *The Enchanted April* the similar weather of London also represents the infelicitous space associated with husbands.

In Elizabeth von Arnim's writing, as has been already stated, a woman's freedom to have access to the books of her choice is vital in terms of felicitous space. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Nassenheide library is, for Elizabeth, the one room in the house in which she feels comfortable. However, for Lucy, the library at The Willows is a hostile space. At Nassenheide, Elizabeth's favourite books are on accessible open shelves around a central pillar symbolizing the importance of her own books in her life. In contrast, Wemyss's books in the library at The Willows were shut in behind glass doors that were locked. The key hung on Wemyss's watch chain so his permission for a book had to be asked. Lucy had been accustomed in her father's house to accessible well-used books in every room. Wemyss's

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books looked to Lucy as though "[t]hey, wouldn't open easily. . . . These were books with which, [like Wemyss], one took no liberties. She couldn't imagine idly turning their pages in some lazy position out on the grass (V, 175-176).

Elizabeth von Arnim was able to read freely in her garden. Lucy discovers Wemyss has not read any of his books. They are there for his own prestige and are a selection from the legitimized male canon of "literature" which has been chosen for Wemyss by a prestigious book shop. Predictably, there are no books written by women amongst them.

Furthermore, Lucy discovers that when Vera first married Wemyss, she enjoyed playing the piano, but eventually gave up playing completely, and Lucy discovers why this is so. The piano was shrouded almost completely with a cover that buttoned up each of its legs. In order to play it, all the buttons had to be undone. After anyone playing it, Wemyss insisted that all the buttons be done up again. The piano was inaccessible like the books in his library were and both are symbolic of Wemyss's engulfing of all his possessions - of which Lucy is but one. Vera continually haunts Lucy in her imagination to an extent that she discovers that "she couldn't get away from Vera" (V, 177). Lucy uncomfortably faces a portrait of Vera as she eats in the dining room. Vera's eyes are on Lucy and she (Vera), smiles a "changeless little strangled smile" (V, 241). This is a smile Vera had produced for Wemyss on cue, and the effort of continually dissembling and the inability to develop a separate identity from Wemyss in female-centred space is reflected in her smile. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth describes the "orthodox smile" of a wife (EGG, 30). The women of *The Enchanted April*,

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as well as Vera, Lucy, and of course, Elizabeth von Arnim, herself, knew the importance of the mandatory smile - even when it was incongruent with their own feelings - for the well being of the male ego.

Lucy finds that Wemyss controls every detail of time and space in the house. She finds that even a fire can not be lit unless Wemyss orders it to be lit. He controls the temperature in the house according to his own needs. He treats the female servants with contempt, and everyone including Lucy must, in effect, dance to his tune, to his time, and to his rhythm - all of which are fixed and unchangeable in his mind. Lucy discovers that everything about the house, including the routine, is exactly as Vera would have experienced it. Nothing has changed, except that instead of Vera, there is herself. The psychological abuse of Lucy by Wemyss means that she polices her own thoughts for him. She learns that to speak spontaneously incurs his wrath. She weighs up every word she utters for fear of Wemyss's displeasure and its consequences, which can be violent anger, followed by resentment and brooding if Lucy does not display a sufficient degree of verbalized penitence. She learns not to disagree with anything he says. The dialogue between them is the discourse of the oppressor and the oppressed. However, Lucy is unable to acknowledge Wemyss's tyranny and continues to blame herself and make excuses for him, such is the extent of his power over her.

The degree of oppression that Wemyss wields upon Lucy becomes so intolerable for her in a particular instance that she escapes out of his presence, unbolts the front door and runs out of the house into the wind and rain. She



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becomes soaked with rain in the short time it takes for her to regret her exit. For Lucy, infelicitous space is both indoors *and* outdoors. There is no felicitous escape. Lucy in this instance, did not experience the liberating feeling that Elizabeth did as she escaped outside. For Elizabeth there is no guilt but rather a sense of triumph. In her German garden, Elizabeth von Arnim feels a strong sense of Self.

Lucy, in comparison, feels less than human - "like a drenched dog" - and very guilty (V, 185). She tries to open the door to enter, but Wemyss has bolted it on the other side. Lucy's stream of consciousness while this is happening is "one welter of anxious penitence and longing and love. . ." (V, 187). She rings the bell and Wemyss opens it, coldly rejecting her embrace of apology. He enters the library and shuts the door behind him. Lucy turns the handle and discovers he has locked her out. She wants to cry out, beat on the door and begins to question his love for her. Lucy wonders where in the house she can go for refuge. The only person she can think of who would understand her is Vera. She wishes on both a conscious and subconscious level that Vera wasn't dead. Lucy knows if Vera wasn't dead she would not have married Wemyss (V, 190). However she will not admit this to herself consciously. She yearns to talk to Vera, as if needing verification of her infelicity.

Lucy then reviews her definitions of "love" which are, of course, synonymous with Wemyss's definitions, such as: "People who love each other can't ever disturb each other" (V, 175). However, just like Lotty and

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Rose in *The Enchanted April*, Lucy cannot see the illusion of the marriage plot, and in a short time she was again excusing his behaviour as the superior one in the relationship; then blaming herself, as the subordinate one, for the incident. Warm now, and wrapped only in Vera's blanket, Lucy enters the library to reconcile with Wemyss. He chastises her for what he sees as sexual provocation and angrily walks out of the room.

Although Wemyss's assumption is wrong, he too, is acting out the romance plot, which dictates that in the sexual encounter men must initiate and women be led. The man is assumed to be sexually experienced and the woman must be virginal. Lucy will not allow herself to feel anger, and she experiences "the deadly loneliness of the one who couldn't get into a rage" (V, 199). Denial is her only coping mechanism and she decides that "the only thing to be done with marriage is to let it wash over one" (V, 236). Ironically, this is an image of drowning and death, rather than an image which will sustain her.

Soon, however, Lucy is filled with a strong desire to escape. In Vera's sitting room she finds a picture painted by Vera of a Mediterranean scene that recalls the garden of San Salvatore in *The Enchanted April*:

It was a brilliant, sunlit place, with a lot of almond trees in full blossom. . . . And through the open door in the wall there was an amazing stretch of hot, vivid country. It stretched on and on till it melted into an ever so far away lovely blue. There was an effect of immense spaciousness, of huge freedom. One could feel oneself running out into it with one's face to the sun . . . in an ecstasy of release, of escape. . . .

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(V, 224-225)

This painting is representative of sensations that Lotty experiences on waking for the first time at San Salvatore when “[a]ll the radiance of April in Italy lay gathered together at her feet” (EA, 78). The almond tree is a native Mediterranean tree and the garden of San Salvatore has an abundance of trees (EA, 146) which blossomed in the last week of April. The blue sky is described in the last paragraph of the novel. Lotty experiences the effect of “the cool roominess of it, [and] the freedom of [her] movements . . .” (EA, 77).

Rose and Lotty, in *The Enchanted April*, imagine the possibility of felicitous space through reading the newspaper advertisement. They are able to make that happen in reality for themselves. Naming their desire to each other empowered them sufficiently to do this. Vera had allowed Wemyss to isolate her in his patriarchal space so she was unlikely to meet a woman like Lotty, and Lucy allows herself to be isolated in a similar way.

Lucy begins to realise her prisoner status. She naively wonders if it is possible for her mind to be “as free as the wind and the sunlight” (V, 217) while her body is a prisoner. Elizabeth von Arnim, however, understands the body, mind and soul to be connected, so that what effects one, effects the other. Lucy acknowledges her fear of Wemyss and her fear of herself in relation to him: “He seemed outside of anything of which she had experience” (V, 217). Ironically, she wonders how many years it will take her to really get to know him. Her soul tries to warn her that one day “her nerve

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would give out and she would collapse . . . into just something that howled and whimpered" (V, 218). Immediately she has thought this, she denies the validity of her feelings and intuition. Lucy counteracts this thought with the ideology and discourse of the romance plot, trying to convince herself that "[w]here there was so much love there must be a way to manage" (V, 218). She finds that her fear of him makes her undesirous of physical intimacy. She thinks back to her feelings of abjection on her honeymoon. Lucy begins to ask herself questions that could give her the knowledge to escape, but she denies the answers that would affirm her reality. Whenever Lucy vaguely attempts to question the meaning of her love for Wemyss, "[she] made a violent lunge after her thoughts and *strangled* them" (V, 178, emphasis added), just as Vera gives a *strangled* smile in the dining room portrait (V, 241, emphasis added).

Historically, illness has been a legitimate and acceptable form of escape for women as it is relatively unthreatening to patriarchy. However, when Lucy becomes ill, Wemyss does not legitimize her illness and demands that she accompany him to London for the week while he works there. Lucy is too ill to agree. Once he has departed from The Willows, Lucy realises she does "not [mind] how much her limbs ached because of the delicious tranquility of her mind" (V, 253). She notices the window is open and - for the first time since arriving at The Willows - that the wind has dropped. She is aware of the birds outside. Lucy experiences a new spacious feeling. Like Lotty, in *The Enchanted April*, to be in bed alone "seemed an amazingly *felicitous* condition" (V, 254, emphasis added). The experience of felicitous space

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though, is brief and negated by Lucy's belief in the marriage plot, so that while she enjoys the freedom of space, she cannot reason as to why this is so.

Her Aunt Dot, (Miss Entwhistle), visits The Willows and sees that although Lucy is very ill, paradoxically, she is all smiles. Lucy is delighted to see her aunt and receive her kindness. Since Lucy does not say anything to the contrary, the aunt assumes that Lucy is happy with Wemyss. However, the aunt experiences some tensions and contradictions about being there. She feels like an interloper, and is acutely aware of Wemyss's dislike of her. However, she does not want to intrude and alienate Lucy. The aunt is also strongly influenced by her belief in the romance plot, and feels that her inferior status as an inexperienced, unmarried woman does not qualify her to judge the health of a marriage. She wants to believe in a happy ending and so initially denies her strong, intuitive feelings that all is not well.

When Lucy's aunt calls for the doctor, he remembers the circumstances of Vera's sojourn at The Willows and the uncomfortable relationship he had with Wemyss at that time. Lucy isolates herself further by withholding her feelings from the doctor, although he has a foreboding that history might be repeating itself. The presence of Lucy's aunt however serves to reassure him. The aunt only feels justified in staying in the house because "she was performing duties under a doctor's directions" (V, 281). She feels ill at ease knowing intuitively that Vera killed herself at The Willows.

Lucy has her first experience of felicitous space since marrying Wemyss. The weather outside in the garden, without Wemyss present, continues to be

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calm and sunny “with the sweet smells of April” (V, 282), as it was in Italy - without the presence of men. She begins to improve, however, she refuses to be honest with her aunt about the unhappiness she has experienced since being married. Both of the women continue to uphold the ideology of romantic heterosexual love. The aunt wonders how Lucy can happily live at The Willows considering the circumstances surrounding Vera’s death. Lucy says that “[she doesn’t] think a house matters when people love each other” (V, 284). The aunt disbelieves her but decides to wait until Lucy is stronger in health to talk to her. Both Lucy and her aunt were “afraid of what talking might lead to” (V, 286). When the aunt examines Vera’s few books, travel itineraries and maps in Lucy/Vera’s sitting room, she detects in their content “such tiredness . . . such a wish for escape” (V, 289). The aunt looks down with dread and foreboding at the flag stones where Vera fell to her death and then, in her next breath, tries to reassure herself with conventional romantic platitudes. Ironically, she then tells herself, “Nothing could harm that child, she was safe, so long as she loved and believed in Everard” (V, 290). Yet at the same time she wonders whether Lucy has enough “humour” and “intelligence” for her survival (V, 290).

Wemyss is unconcerned about Lucy while in London. The narrator accounts for this by saying:

Being extremely methodical he had long ago divided his life inside and out into compartments, each strictly separate, each, as it were, kept locked till the proper moment for its turn arrived, when he unlocked it and took out its contents,—work,

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bridge, dinner, wife, sleep, Paddington, The Willows or what ever it was that it contained.  
(V, 268)

The library and the piano at The Willows function in this way. Each compartment is under strict control and locked to all outsiders. Nothing is interrelated. Everything is "finished" whenever he decides to lock it. The implications for Lucy are that her marriage has become a conclusion. It has "finished" her. It is to avoid this "finishing" that Elizabeth von Arnim values her garden space and the locus of open-ended meaning that it is for her.

The ultimate question Aunt Dot asks herself is whether Lucy has the strength "for staying or for running . . . for her very *life*. . . " (V, 291). The aunt is well aware that Lucy is treading the same path as Vera. She knows her niece is married to a tyrant, and her denial is ironical because what she finds intolerable is the "tyranny of *suggestion* in everything one looked at here, in everything one touched" (V, 291, emphasis added). She does not want to break the illusion of her belief in the conventional love script with Wemyss as the hero. She plans to leave before Wemyss's arrival but he comes home early. He treats Miss Entwhistle with disdain, and insists that she pay the doctor's bill since she had sent for the doctor without consulting him. She manages to confront him and he is outraged, telling her she has made a great mistake by "interfering between husband and wife" (V, 310). This reflects the saying, "An Englishman's home is his castle," along with its inference of the freedom of men to maintain order and control in any way

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they choose, beyond the law, in the private domain.<sup>3</sup> In confronting Wemyss indirectly with having driven Vera to suicide and suggesting that “[Lucy] hasn’t the staying power of Vera” (V, 310), the aunt is violating the sanctity of his “castle”. The desire to resort to physical violence is always just beneath the surface of Wemyss and he has the desire to kill the aunt. Instead, he banishes her from the house, refusing to let her say goodbye to Lucy, and tells her of his intention to prevent her from seeing Lucy in the future. “He shut and bolted and locked and chained her out” (V, 313), then returned to the bedroom where Lucy was oblivious to the aunt’s dismissal. The novel ends at this point without any resolution for Lucy or her aunt.

Lucy is unable to recognise and name that part of her that Elizabeth von Arnim defines and fervently strives to protect and nourish: namely, her soul. Elizabeth von Arnim reveals the ideology of the romance and marriage plot to be potentially treacherous for women. Lucy believes if she cannot make the marriage plot work, then the fault must be with her, and her alone. She has no framework with which to perceive any alternative for her life.

It is the use of a deep vein of irony throughout *Vera* that provides Elizabeth von Arnim, the writer, with a major technique to effectively subvert the ideology of the the romance plot. Irony renders Wemyss - the assumed hero of the romance plot - to be not only a monster, but an *absurd* monster. If Lucy had consciously understood both the liberatory and

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<sup>3</sup> This was the reality of the dominant male culture in Elizabeth von Arnim’s time, and one of the consequences of that reality was the silencing of women about any abuse inflicted upon them in the domestic sphere.



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debilitating concepts of oppression that Elizabeth von Arnim writes about, she would have considered escaping from The Willows.

There is no resolution in *Vera*, since Lucy is so submerged in Wemyss's patriarchal space that she cannot even yearn for a female-centred space. Even Vera's painting of a sun-filled Italian scene fails to arouse in Lucy a conscious need to escape from The Willows to a place of felicity. Her misguided love for Wemyss becomes the consuming reality of her existence. Lucy is unaware of the mythologies she lives by, in contrast to Elizabeth von Arnim's ironic self-awareness of the arbitrariness of patriarchy's myths, stories and plots. Lucy, unlike Elizabeth von Arnim, is not "conscious of the ironic distance between the self as formulated externally . . . and the self as an internal process of redefinition and discovery" ( Walker 1990, 78). For Lucy, escaping from Wemyss and The Willows would mean homelessness, whereas for Elizabeth von Arnim, home is not within a house, but in her own female-centred space. The ability of Elizabeth von Arnim to see her Self with ironic detachment enables her to create felicitous space for her soul in a way that few of her other female protagonists do, however, this did not always happen in practice during her life.

In the novel *Vera*, Elizabeth von Arnim dramatically demonstrates the ironic distance between the culture and ideology of romantic love and its human reality for women. She reveals the ideology of romantic love to be a culturally defined construct and renders it both absurd as well as destructive for women. In *Vera*, the discourse of the social convention of romantic love

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becomes sinister and macabre through Elizabeth von Arnim's pervasive use of irony.

Elizabeth von Arnim gives detailed insight into the mind of an oppressor throughout the novel which culminates in Wemyss's internal and external struggle with the shock of the aunt's assertiveness with him. His misogyny is fully revealed in his desire to maintain power and control not only over Lucy, but everyone he comes across. The last scene depicts Wemyss in the bedroom with Lucy. He infantilizes her, as he has often done, by calling her his "baby" (V, 319). In doing so he denies her adult status, as well as her female sexuality: in short, he denies Lucy her full humanity. Any faint glimmer of Lucy's reality is never allowed to encroach into Wemyss's dominant male-centred space. Wemyss's reality always rules.

In the first year of her marriage to Francis, Earl Russell, Elizabeth von Arnim escaped from him to America. To her daughter, Liebert, she wrote: "I would far rather die than go on living as I am" (quoted in Usborne 1986, 196). Elizabeth's escape from Francis, Earl Russell had to be a calculated one, as she was as much a prisoner at Telegraph House in Sussex, as Lucy and Vera had been at the imaginary English country estate called The Willows in the novel. However, Elizabeth von Arnim returned from America to her oppressor and endured a further two years of oppression before finally reclaiming the autonomy that she has experienced as so empowering during the period of her widowhood.

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The significance of the novel *Vera* for Elizabeth von Arnim as a writer, as well as for her sense of Self, is that she was able to give full imaginative expression to her extreme experiences of oppression within the anonymous protection of the genre of fiction and with the detachment of the ironic stance. *Vera* symbolizes a very low point and ebb on Elizabeth von Arnim's trajectory, yet the novel was instrumental to the expanding shape of her trajectory in its tracing of the process of her becoming. The Willows is an imaginative place representing a major interanimation of Elizabeth von Arnim's life as lived, with her life as imagined through her text.

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### The Galgenberg Mountain Garden

*When she hits on the deepest truth about  
who she is and tells her story of becoming . . .  
she gains access to a world that is fertile and  
abundant as the most verdant garden.*

—EMILY HANCOCK

*When they ask me what I think  
Of living in the azure mountains,  
I laugh and do not answer  
That my heart here finds rest—  
The peach blossoms and the flowing stream  
Go far, far away.  
There is another universe  
Where there are no men.*

—LI-PO.

At a superficial level of analysis, Elizabeth von Arnim's novels have been viewed as "romances," and *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* is no exception. For example, the back cover synopsis of the 1983 Virago edition of *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* reads: "Rose-Marie and Roger fall in love. But the course of true love does not run smooth." Likewise, the introduction to *Vera* states that Elizabeth von Arnim was "a writer whose *métier* was strongly founded in the romantic idyll" (V, v). The development and application of theoretical frameworks in recent times has been instrumental in more accurately assessing and valuing Elizabeth von Arnim's writings for what they actually are: ironic subversions of the

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traditional romance genre.

Rose-Marie Schmidt, the female protagonist of Elizabeth von Arnim's novel, *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, is a striking contrast to the character of Lucy, in *Vera*. Like Lucy and the women in *The Enchanted April*, Rose-Marie also experiences the contradictions and tensions of the romance plot, however, she is the only female protagonist of those discussed in this thesis, that awakens fully to the illusions of the plot's ideology. Subsequently, after a time of restoration, she deliberately maintains and utilizes the new relationship and distance between her Self and her oppressive suitor, thereby guaranteeing the protection and development of her identity within a female-centred space.

Rose-Marie, as the speaking subject, contrasts, ironically, two separate realities and economies: hers and Roger's - giving validity and superiority to her own, and showing his to be mainly an ideologically constructed social artifice that proves to be pathetically inadequate. This happens as a result of a protracted and searching process on Rose-Marie's part, which forms the basis of the communication between the two by letter.

While the novel appears at the beginning to follow the conventions of the romance plot, Elizabeth von Arnim deconstructs the plot and shows Roger's belief in the plot to be destructive for Rose-Marie's soul. Through Elizabeth von Arnim's writing of the communication process between these two protagonists in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, she is able to

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further develop her understanding of felicitous space and its central importance in her life. The novel marks a higher and more expansive felicitous point on the trajectory of her literary and personal career, which is symbolized by Rose-Marie's position on the Galgenberg mountain.

The novel *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* is structured by one hundred and thirty-one letters spanning fourteen months. The letters are written by Fräulein Rose-Marie Schmidt, a young German woman of humble origin, to Mr Roger Anstruther, a privileged young Englishman from the upper middle class. The letter writing begins following their secret engagement. Roger has declared his love for Rose-Marie and proposed to her just an hour before his return to England, after a year as a student, living with Rose-Marie and her father, a professor, in the German town of Jena.

Rose-Marie writes the first letter in which she declares her love for Roger and describes the new sensation of being "in love". She initially describes it as an awakening, since she believes it is love that is making the difference between her present happiness and past unhappiness (S & A, 3). Rose-Marie tells him that prior to this experience of love she was "most wretched . . . blind and deaf . . . only half a woman" (S & A, 3). Rose-Marie's awakening seems ironic when contrasted to the awakening of Elizabeth on her first sighting of the garden at Nassenheide, since it is the circumstances and oppressions resulting from romance followed by marriage that have caused Elizabeth von Arnim to feel "perfectly miserable" (EGG, 6,) and as if her life had been a waste (EGG, 6 & 8). Rose-Marie, like Elizabeth von Arnim, has

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been constructed to believe that romantic heterosexual love, ending in marriage, is the ultimate fulfilment for a woman. Elizabeth, though, has experienced, and is conscious of the illusion of that belief *before* she discovers the garden at Nassenheide, and the more time she spends in the garden, the more she realises the extent of the illusion of the romance plot.

By the seventh letter of *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, Rose-Marie's descriptions of the experience of being in love reveal a growing discomfort and infelicity. She says:

How strange and dreadful love is! . . . For isn't it a descent? . . . Somehow, though it is so great a glory, it's a coming-down as well—*down from the pride of absolute independence of body and soul . . . to something fierce, and hot, and consuming. . . .* My soul [seems] to stand still. . . . I do feel love hurts. I do feel as if I'd been thrown on to rocks, left by myself on them to come slowly to my senses and find I am lying alone in a new and burning sun. It's an exquisite sort of pain, but it's very nearly unbearable. . . . I'm learning for the first time in my life what it means, that saying about eating out one's heart.  
(S & A, 31-32, emphasis added)

In describing her experience of love as a loss of independence of body and soul, the subtitle of the novel, *Being The Letters of an Independent Woman* appears, at this point, to be ironic. As Julia Kristeva states: "[I]n the rapture of love, the limits of one's own identity vanish, at the time that the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love's discourse . . ." (Kristeva 1987, 2). The romance plot conflates the boundaries between self and Other,

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and in doing so diminishes individual identity, and this is what Rose-Marie experiences on “falling in love” with Roger. She finds herself wanting to merge with his identity and his reality.

The contents of Roger’s letters are interpreted solely from Rose-Marie’s subject position, and the significance of this will be fully explained later in the chapter. The content of Rose-Marie’s letters show Roger to be not only far away physically, but remote from an understanding and appreciation of Rose-Marie and her soul. It soon becomes apparent that Roger has a new love interest of his own class, in England. Rose-Marie suspects this, but does not want to believe it. Roger writes less frequently and she responds by writing: “How shall I live till you write that you do still love me?” (S & A, 68). In desperation, she thinks of going to England. She is, she tells him, “so *dependent* on [his] kindness for *the very power* to go on living” (S & A, 54, emphasis added). Her words are ironic, since the dependence she speaks of amounts to *powerlessness*. It is the language of the oppressed and recalls the inner discourse of Lucy, in *Vera*, except that Rose-Marie is not subject to the extreme degree of psychological and physical control that Lucy was.

Then a letter from Roger arrives that confirms her suspicions. He is engaged to the wealthy daughter of his father’s oldest friend. In replying to him she does not attempt to conceal her grief. However, she ends on a note of dignity and determination: “[D]o you suppose that, having given you all this, I am going to give you my soul as well? To moan my life away, my beautiful life? You are not worth it. . . . You are quite invertebrate. My life



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shall be splendid in spite of you" (S & A, 77). If Lucy had been able to say these words to Wemyss, she might have liberated herself.

Soon after writing this letter, Rose-Marie, becomes ill. Roger expresses a desire to continue the correspondence. He has written and asked if they can be "friends" (S & A, 81) and Rose-Marie agrees. She has come through a serious illness and is now, like Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, experiencing felicitous space by spending time in the garden. She has also been empowered by reading female authors (no male authors are mentioned), such as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen: writers who, like Elizabeth von Arnim, offer female readers a variety of subject positions within a double narrative of surface conventionality with an ironic subtext beneath it.<sup>1</sup> The locked bookcases in the library at The Willows, in *Vera*, have no such books to show Lucy an alternative subject position. Like Elizabeth von Arnim, Rose-Marie Schmidt has a passion for poetry and reading outdoors which stimulates her creative imagination and extends her boundaries of felicitous space. Rose-Marie describes to Roger the beauty of what she is experiencing and concludes: "My life is very rich within" (S & A, 189). Roger, by contrast, is bored with working at the Foreign Office and is full of complaints about his life. Like Wemyss in the novel *Vera*, Roger's mind "was always made up. There seemed no moment when it was in the process of becoming" (V, 142). Rose-Marie reflects back to him his privileged background and existence, comparing his soul with a

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<sup>1</sup> With reference to the chapter entitled "Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and the Height of Achievement," in *Mothers of the Novel* (270-300). Also, the individual chapters on these two writers in *Living By the Pen* (126-159).

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washerwoman's or ploughboy's:

I imagine their souls thin and threadbare, stunted by cold and hunger . . . but certainly there. And I don't know that it is not a nicer sort of soul to have inside one's plodding body than an unwieldy, overgrown thing, chiefly water and air and lightly changeable stuff, so unsubstantial that it flops. . . .

(S & A, 87)

Rose-Marie has chosen to continue writing to him on her terms, which are that she will write to please herself rather than him, as the quotation above demonstrates. She tells him that during her recuperation she has had room to think, and so gained new perspectives (S & A, 89). The relationship between the two of them will be, she says, "a solid bread-and butter sort of relationship . . . as a set-off to a diet of constant cake" (S & A, 89) that she perceives his communication with his fiancée to be. "Constant cake" continues the thematic metaphor of the romance plot as unsatisfying food, lacking nourishment to sustain a woman's felicity and process of becoming. She is, she says, prepared to offer him genuine friendship, and the nourishment of bread and butter will, she hopes, be a satisfying communication of one soul to another.

The irony and playfulness demonstrated throughout the novel by Rose-Marie's character suggests that it is an experiment, on her part, to see if Roger is capable of a friendship in which they can both reveal their souls to each other and develop as a result. It is as if he is being put on trial, by Rose-Marie. Although she suspects he is incapable of personal development, she persists

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for the sake of her own Self development. The experiment centres around Rose-Marie's wondering whether there is a heterosexual relationship possible between the short-lived heights of romance and its "[ending] in "smoke and nothingness, put out by the steady drizzle of marriage" (S & A, 216). Oppressive rain in this novel continues to be a negative metaphor for marriage, as it was in *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*.

Rose-Marie first expresses the above sentiments directly to Roger, and indirectly, in a later letter to him when she recounts a visit from her cousin, Elschen. She asks Elschen if she can imagine an "alternative" kind of relationship between a man and woman to romance and marriage. Elschen can not comprehend what she means, and Rose-Marie observes, as she asks the question, that Elschen was "trying to twist her wedding-ring round on her finger, but it couldn't twist because it was too deeply embedded" (S & A, 277). This image continues the symbolism of the belief expressed by Elizabeth von Arnim and demonstrated by her female protagonists that marriage, for a woman, means constriction and closure in terms of the fulfilment of her potential as a human being.

Rose-Marie attends a *Kaffee-Klatsch*<sup>2</sup> with the other women in the village of Jena, but she cannot identify with any of them. She feels the isolation that Elizabeth von Arnim experienced in women's social gatherings, first in Berlin, and then at Nassenheide. In *The Enchanted April*, Caroline also experiences an isolation from the other women at San Salvatore, who

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<sup>2</sup> Coffee gossip.

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ultimately identify with patriarchal space.

In revealing her soul to Roger, Rose-Marie is hoping that a new exchange may be possible between them both. She envisages an encounter that Luce Irigaray terms an "interlocution;" that is, "a reciprocal and reversible relation between addressee and addressor, where neither position is reducible to or occupied by the other" (Irigaray, explained in Grosz 1989, 182). This proves to be impossible since Roger continually displays hostility and contempt for Rose-Marie's difference. Because of his attitude, Rose-Marie is frequently confrontational towards him in order that he does not subsume her. If he could have recognised and celebrated what Luce Irigaray describes as "the irreducible alterity of each to the other" (Irigaray, explained in Grosz 1989, 176), there could have been fruitful written encounters between Rose-Marie and Roger. In order for a man and a woman to recognise each other's alterity, Luce Irigaray believes that "a space of wonder" (quoted in Grosz 1989, 177), is necessary. She says, "Wonder keeps the two sexes non-interchangeable regarding the status of their difference. It maintains between them a free and attracting space, a possibility of separation and union . . ." (quoted in Grosz 1989, 177). Luce Irigaray is describing a relationship of equals in which difference is celebrated and neither the man nor the woman has ownership or dialogue rights over the other.

In her letters to Roger, Rose-Marie writes her way out of any obligation to fulfil the construction and conventions of the romance plot with him. She

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does this in various ways. She reveals the illusion of the romance plot in literature. She speculates on the story of Tristan and Isolde, imagining the outcome if Tristan had not been killed:

Isolde would have married Tristan. There would have been . . . no divine hours in the garden, no acute, exquisite anguish of love and sorrow. But there would presently have been the Middle Ages equivalent for a perambulator, a contented Tristan . . . a faded Isolde who did not care for poetry admonishing . . . and quite quickly afterwards a Tristan grown too comfortable to move, and an Isolde with wrinkles.

(S & A, 47-48)

Rose-Marie is aware that the illusion of the marriage plot can not be sustained. She says, "My point is, that if you want to let yourself go to great emotions you ought to have the luck to die at an interesting moment. The alternative makes such a dreary picture. . . ." (S & A, 48). She sees this dreary picture in the marriages of the people around her in Jena, and relates their stories in her letters to Roger. In each story the woman is diminished, and Rose-Marie perceives how the construct of femininity and its consequent gender inequalities affect women negatively in marriage. She observes that:

The woman plays such a losing game. She gives so much, and gets so little. . . . [B]ut he [the man] never seems able to go on loving her once she has begun to wither. That is very odd. She does not mind his withering. And has she not a soul. And does not that grow always lovelier?"

(S & A, 45-46)

Rose-Marie exposes marriage as a gain for men and a loss for women. For

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women, including herself, she sees it as a closure.

For Rose-Marie, like most of Elizabeth von Arnim's female protagonists, love and marriage mean a damaged soul - a hungry soul, or - at worst - one in grave danger of withering. The difference, though, between Rose-Marie and them is that Rose-Marie recognises and articulates that hunger more clearly than any of the other female protagonists are able. This is illustrated when she explains to Roger how differently she and he anticipate love. Rose-Marie tells him:

You . . . think of love as a perpetual crescendo, and I, though I do hear the crescendo and follow it with a joyful clapping of hands up to the very top of its splendour, can never forget the drop on the other side, the inevitable diminuendo to dead level—and then?

(S & A, 48)

Rose-Marie's perception of the ideology of romantic love and marriage as destructive for her soul gives her a new zest for living and a clarity of vision. It frees her from the construct of femininity and energizes her for the creation of new dimensions of felicitous space. She laughs at the thought of people calling her an *armes Madchen*,<sup>3</sup> and is not affected anymore by the stigma of the term. Just as it was for Elizabeth von Arnim when she saw the wilderness garden, Rose-Marie's new perception may be said to mark "the beginning of [her] real life" (EGG, 8). Rose-Marie describes feeling full of wonder and an unspeakable relief" (S & A, 96) at being free of the romance

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<sup>3</sup> Old maid.

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plot. With ironic humour, she likens her infelicitous experience of love and subsequent broken engagement as “the manure that brings forth roses lovely in proportion to its manuriness . . .” (S & A, 96). Rose-Marie begins to realise that had she married Roger, she would have been trapped by the codes of behaviour and oppressions of Roger’s fixed constructions relating to both class and gender.

Through her letters to Roger, Rose-Marie gains a new self-knowledge and self-acceptance which as Thomas Moore says is “the very foundation of soul” (Moore 1992, xvii ). Like Elizabeth, she begins to observe her soul and care for it, creating felicitous space where at all possible, for her soul’s nourishment. Rose-Marie, just as Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates in her autobiographical writings, applies a poetics to everyday life. Rose-Marie discovers that “the most minute details and the most ordinary activities, carried out with mindfulness and art, have an effect far beyond their apparent insignificance” (Moore 1992, 285). She tells Roger that she now realises that her happiness is dependent not on love and marriage, but on “what [she can] dig out of [her] own self” (S & A, 99, emphasis added). For this, she tells him she needs “space, time, concentration, for getting at the true sweet *root of life*” (S & A, 139, emphasis added). Rose-Marie, like Elizabeth, is ontologically connected with the garden, considering her soul to be in a continuous process and, like a garden, never finished and always open-ended.

Roger resents Rose-Marie’s felicity and independence and finds her transformative process threatening rather than stimulating, since this process

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is outside of his control and understanding. As Rose-Marie describes the qualities, relatedness and dimensions of her Self and her daily experience of life, he in turn, criticises her for what she perceives as her cultivation of a richly expressive and meaningful life. Roger resents her writing of her simple daily pleasures. He chastises her for naming her world and regards her reality as insignificant. Roger, however, is no different to the male writers of legitimated "History" in this respect. His social construction does not allow him to understand or appreciate that Rose-Marie's soul needs a space that is female-centred. Her connection with her body and soul both irritates and threatens him. She is aware of this and confronts him saying: "What you apparently resent are the letters with sturdy sentiments in them and a robust relish of life. It almost seems as if you didn't want me to be happy" (S & A, 128). As Luce Irigaray observes: "[M]ale peoples are structured in accordance with civil and religious norms that drastically reduce and transform reality" (Irigaray 1993, 28). In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth's husband, the Man of Wrath, denies Elizabeth's reality, whereas the most extreme example of this attitude in Elizabeth von Arnim's texts is shown by Wemyss, in *Vera*, where he forcibly distorts her reality.

To counteract Roger's negation of her reality, Rose-Marie deliberately names and describes her experiences of felicitous space, such as the evening where she gathered up her skirts and went down through the soaked grass to look at some pink China roses. She expresses the pleasures experienced through her senses. A robin came and sat on the fence near her and began to sing. The soaked green grass and the pink of the roses recalls the colours and



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textures of Elizabeth's female-centred space in the garden at Nassenheide, as does the bird song (S & A, 146). Roger responds by insinuating she is selfish for writing of pleasure rather than of her duty to others. He seems affronted that Rose-Marie can sustain happiness alone and irrespective of the receipt of his letters.

Likewise Elizabeth's husband, the Man of Wrath, thinks Elizabeth is selfish for taking pleasure in the garden rather than doing her duty to him in his domain. He is incensed that Elizabeth's happiness is not dependent upon his presence. The more Roger rails, though the more Rose-Marie insists on continuing to gleefully name her life and her reality. She tells him: "You must let me write how and what I like—bear with me while I discourse of roses and nasturtium-beds, of rain and sunshine, clouds and wind, cats, birds. . . . My life is nothing greater than these. If you want to hear from me you must hear also of them" (S & A, 180). Rose-Marie is able to maintain the security of her position and speak with her own voice because of the protection that the physical distance between her and Roger affords. Furthermore, the protection of distance heightens her consciousness of her female-centred reality.

Other aspects of Rose-Marie's reality that Roger criticises are her experimenting with vegetarianism to which she replies: "You are one of a flock; and you disapprove of sheep like myself that choose to wander off and browse alone" (S & A, 148). He also expects her to have similar tastes in books. For instance, Roger posts her a book as a gift and marks passages that

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he thinks are important for Rose-Marie to read. She replies: "[T]he passages you marked are the ones I care about least" (S & A, 107), and so resists Roger's attempt to direct her to his androcentric reality through books. Rose-Marie retains her ability not only to choose her books, but also to browse where she wants to within books. Elizabeth von Arnim also enjoyed browsing for new horizons in literature. In *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen*, it was when Elizabeth was "fingering the books, taking out first one and then another, dipping into them, deciding which [she] would read next" (E in R, 2) that she came upon the book that inspired her imagination enough to want to visit the island of Rügen.

Rose-Marie, like Elizabeth in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, reads a book because it nourishes her soul, not merely because a particular book is said to be worthy, and she comments, ironically, on the limitations that the exclusionary male literary canon poses to experiencing a wide variety of other writing with perspectives to which she, as a woman, can relate. She says:

I think it would . . . [be] tiring to be screwed up perpetually to the pitch of the greatest men's greatest moments. Such heights are not for insects like myself. I would hang very dismally, with drooping head and wings, on those exalted hooks. And has not the soul too its longings at times for a dressing-gown and slippers?  
(S & A, 163)

Rose-Marie is relatively formally uneducated in comparison to Roger, yet she sees it as an advantage to possess what she calls "an unpruned intelligence"

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(S & A, 111). This frees her to choose a selection of books that is much broader than Roger's adherence to a canon, and has the effect of extending her boundaries, increasing her understanding of her life and deepening the quality of her felicity. Rose-Marie perceives that Roger's education has pruned him to such an extent that it controls, constructs and limits his capacity to understand, and therefore accept her felicitous vision of life.

Rose-Marie, unlike any other of Elizabeth von Arnim's female protagonists, is able to accurately and fully articulate the desires of her soul, as opposed to the other female protagonists who are influenced to varying degrees by the reality of the male protagonists. However, Rose-Marie admits that this is only possible because of writing, rather than speaking face to face with Roger. He cannot interrupt or silence her as she writes - or - as he reads her letters. He must follow the flow of her thoughts to their conclusion. This gives Rose-Marie the control and protection to judge, affirm, and maintain her own reality through the safe process of communication achieved through letter writing. Her capacity to maintain this equal stance would be severely limited in the event of his invasion of her physical boundaries.

When Wemyss tells Lucy she has hurt him, (which, in reality, means that Lucy has ventured an opinion contrary to his own), Lucy becomes abject in her feelings of guilt and in her attempts to make amends. When Roger tells Rose-Marie that a letter hurts him, there is an absence of guilt on the part of Rose-Marie, and no apology is forthcoming from her. Instead, she can write from a position of superiority, symbolized by her position on the Galgenberg

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mountain:

I am sorry. Sorry I mean that you should be so soft. Can you not, then, bear anything? But I will smooth my tongue if you prefer it smooth, and send you envelopes filled only with sugar . . . and, patting you at short intervals on the back, tell you you are admirable.

(S & A, 105)

Roger wants Rose-Marie to take the unified subject position of the heroine in the romance plot who would flatter and look up to him. He criticises Rose-Marie for being full of contradictions. Her response is to retort: "Of course I am full of contradictions. . . . I do not pretend to think quite the same even two days running; if I did I would be stagnant, and the very essence of life is to be fluid, to pass perpetually on" (S & A, 104). Rose-Marie may be said to be describing herself as a subject in process. The more Roger criticises her, the less she cares what he thinks of her, and the more she develops a "self affection" and a pleasure in her own company, as Elizabeth does in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Rose-Marie is not dependent on Roger's correspondence for her felicity, and she gives him the choice of writing or not writing. Rose-Marie's playful, ironic soul is unappreciated, misunderstood, and disapproved of by Roger because she represents a different, and therefore threatening reality, which she fully expresses with impunity to his own reality which has been carefully constructed by patriarchal society, schools, and religious dogmas of the class he was born into and inculcated with.

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Not materially rich or powerful by Roger's standards, Rose-Marie pits herself against the dominant male culture and, refuses to be its victim, by showing it, and not her to be lacking: "Compared with yours I deliberately consider my life glorious. And when will you see that there are kinds of gloriousness that cannot be measured in money or position?" (S & A, 138). It is as if all the members of that culture, (with Roger as their representative), are a captive audience listening to *her* reality, *her* pleasure, *her* images, *her* apertures, rather than its silences and closures being imposed upon her.

Rose-Marie affirms her quest for felicity when she sees the way in which her stepmother dies. As she sits with her in those last moments, she contrasts the scent of calla-lilies "when the sun was on them, the honey-sweet smell of life, intense, penetrating, filling every corner of the room with splendid, pagan summer [with her stepmother] on the bed [tossing] . . . muttering ceaselessly to herself of Christ" (S & A, 125). The stepmother has lived strictly according to cultural prescriptions and a religious belief system and, consequently, she has not lived fully and felicitously in the present.

Rose-Marie, like Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth in Her German Garden*, and Lotty in *The Enchanted April*, questions the belief in a disembodied, nebulous after-life which causes them to defer their pleasure while they are alive. Elizabeth found her "kingdom of heaven" (EGG, 7) in the garden. This questioning of a belief system frees them to expand their felicitous space without guilt. Like Elizabeth's soul, Rose-Marie's soul is also repelled by cold, stark church interiors and the guilt-inducing dogma instilled into people

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within them. In *The Enchanted April*, Rose's soul is oppressed by religious ideology, causing her to feel sinful for seeking her own pleasure.

Rose-Marie, by contrast, has this to remark about "sin": "A sinner should always . . . sin gaily or not at all. . . . [H]alf-hearted sinners are contemptible. It is a poor creature who while [she] sins is sorry" (S & A, 177). In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth states that women only indulge in penitence when their souls are so empty they can only look back rather than create felicitous spaces. (EGG, 131). Rose-Marie describes the frequent pencilled comments in her late mother's prayerbook. It becomes apparent that mother, like daughter, had questioned dominant discourses. Her mother's profuse writing in the margins symbolizes a female-centred space on the boundary of the patriarchal discourse. Rose-Marie goes on to say that:

at the end of each of those involved clauses [of the Athanasian Creed] that try quite vainly, yet with an air of defying criticism, to describe the undescribable, my mother has written with admirable caution "Perhaps."  
(S & A, 266)

The "perhaps" reveals Elizabeth von Arnim's ironic consciousness of the relativity of truth. The ideological beliefs and the social institutions that maintain them (such as religious and educational systems), have a negative influence on the soul of Elizabeth von Arnim's other female protagonists in *The Enchanted April* and *Vera*. However, when considered in the light of Rose-Marie's subject position, these beliefs are made to seem arbitrary and impotent in Elizabeth von Arnim's writing.

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Earlier in the novel Rose-Marie has alerted Roger to a key for the understanding of her discourse. She says: "Observe, I speak in images" (S & A, 9). The Galgenberg garden is the most significant image in the novel for a number of different reasons. Although it is small, it has a vast view as a result of its altitude and position and this is analogous to Rose-Marie's world view as opposed to Roger's. The wilderness garden at Nassenheide is an image that Elizabeth von Arnim speaks through to (re)create and define her Self in her own image. The garden is, therefore, synonymous with the domain of both Elizabeth's and Rose-Marie's soul. Roger writes saying he wants to visit Rose-Marie in her new home: a cottage on the south (symbolic of sunshine), slope of the Galgenberg mountain overlooking Jena.

Roger is wanting to begin the romance plot with her again, and Rose-Marie refuses his request. His lack of regard for her female-centred space is an accurate indication for Rose-Marie of how he would perceive and treat, not only her garden, but also her Self when in close physical proximity to her. In *The Enchanted April*, Lotty and Rose couldn't realistically visualize their husbands' intrusion from London into their female-centred space. Rose-Marie, in contrast, can clearly visualize Roger's intrusion from London. She tells him he would be like a splendid bird entering the space of a shabby sparrow and taking up all the space on her perch and nest on the side of a precipice (S & A, 151). She has already told him that it is not possible to sit down or stroll in her garden (S & A, 126). She describes it as "an unrestful place, in which you are forced to be energetic, to watch where you put your feet, to balance yourself . . . to be continually on the alert" (S & A, 171). Her

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garden is a space which would be as difficult for him to appreciate and negotiate as her soul has been for him. Rose-Marie knows she is continually moving, developing and growing and has chosen to live in a place that promotes this, as well as being symbolically out of Roger's grasp. Roger has been trained over many years to adhere to the codes of behaviour determined by the class system into which he was born in England. He is like a piece of marble or granite, in that his position is fixed and impenetrable due to his cultural and social construction.

Rose-Marie tries to stimulate Roger's soul to respond, but her efforts are to no avail. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth describes a rose named "Dr Grill" that she has nurtured in her garden to no avail, and the description of this rose's refusal to thrive bears an apt analogy to Roger:

He ["Dr Grill"], had the best place in the garden—warm, sunny and sheltered . . . he was given the most dainty mixture of compost, clay, and manure; he was watered assiduously all through the drought when more willing flowers got nothing; and he refused to do anything but look black and shrivel. He did not die, but neither did he live—he just existed; and at the end of the summer not one of him had a scrap more shoot or leaf than when he was first put in in April.  
(EGG, 100)

As a male member of the ruling English upper class, Roger has had all the privileges of patriarchy, but is unable to relate to his soul as Rose-Marie has shown him she can do. Elizabeth von Arnim has created a double narrative in describing "Dr Grill". The name and title symbolize patriarchy. The



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meanings of the word "grill" include a figurative one for torture or great heat, or a latticed screen in front of the "ladies" gallery in the House of Commons, symbolizing separation and hierarchy between men and women. Elizabeth von Arnim is speaking conventionally of her gardening experience on one level, yet on another she is condemning patriarchy in its refusal to live soulfully and generously.

The Galgenberg garden is symbolically unrestful, since Rose-Marie has always to be on the alert against probable attack and invasion from Roger. She must continually balance herself carefully on the sloped garden, ever mindful of the possibility of slipping into "a descent. . . . [F]rom absolute independence of body and soul. . . . [T]o the place where love dashes madly against the rocks" (S & A, 32). The place on the rocks signifies the dependence of a stifling, hierarchical, heterosexual love relationship. The German name *Galgenberg* means literally "gallows mountain," and seems analogous with Rose-Marie's trial of Roger in which she has the positional advantage.

The Galgenberg garden which Rose-Marie describes so negatively to Roger, takes on quite different proportions when described within the context of her own felicitous experience of it. The dimensions of the confined and uncomfortable space explained to Roger actually expand as she describes how the garden enriches her life and happiness. Rose-Marie writes of a night,

dark and soft . . . of a limitless vastness. . . . [O]f identity with the darkness, the silence, the scent. [She says] my feet were wet

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with dew; my hair with *the warm and gentle rain*. I lifted up my face and let the drops fall on it through the leaves of the apple-trees, warm and gentle as a caress.

(S & A, 171-172, emphasis added)

The rain falling in Rose-Marie's Galgenberg garden is not hostile, oppressive rain like the rain in London in *The Enchanted April*. Neither was the rain experienced as hostile by Lotty and Rose on their arrival at San Salvatore. In both instances, the absence of men makes the difference between the rain being perceived as hostile, or rain being perceived as a loving caress. The narrator of *The Enchanted April* anticipated that when the Italian rain stopped, "the earth would be strewn with roses" (EA, 61). The rain in both locations is welcome because of the symbolism of the felicitous context of female-centred space.

When Roger announces his broken engagement to Rose-Marie, this news, once again, confirms her disenchantment with love and marriage, as do the heterosexual couples falling in and out of love around her in Jena and Galgenberg. She makes it clear to Roger that she does not wish their relationship to regress back to the romance plot. Her letters reveal an increasing Self empowerment and expansion of felicitous space:

This was no world in which to lament. . . . The thought that a man's marrying one or not could make so much as the faintest smudge across the bright hopefulness of life made me laugh aloud with healthiest derision. . . . My body tingled. My hair grew damp about my forehead. The sun smiled broadly down upon my back.

(S & A, 301-302)

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Rose-Marie is describing a felicitous experience in the winter snow, yet it could be a spring day in April at San Salvatore, or a summer's day in the garden at Nassenheide. Most of Elizabeth von Arnim's female protagonists experience *jouissance* when they are able to perceive and experience nature as a female-centred space. When the senses of Elizabeth von Arnim and her female protagonists are enlivened by felicitous female-centred space, they experience nature as a more generous, sensitive, stimulating lover than a man. This particular subversion of the heterosexual love plot occurs in each text, discussed in this thesis. Even Lucy, in her illness, responds with relief and pleasure to the scents and sounds of spring coming through the open window in Wemyss's absence.

Despite Rose-Marie emphatically having told Roger that she has no desire to see him at her home on the mountain, Roger - uninvited - physically invades her Galgenberg space, however, Rose-Marie is out at the time. Still determined to see her, he writes a further letter inviting her to meet him in Berlin. Rose-Marie replies: "Must I thank you? No, I don't think I will. I will not pretend conventionally with you" (S & A, 347). She insists on maintaining the territory and boundaries she has established for the protection and growth of her soul by telling him, "Love is not a thing you can pick up and throw into the gutter and pick up again as the fancy takes you" (S & A, 376). She will only consider continuing a friendship by correspondence with him. The relationship, she repeats, is to be on her terms, or not at all, unlike Lucy, in *Vera*, who was unable to refuse Wemyss's terms. Rose-Marie is ever mindful of Roger's attempts to crush

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her soul, and she explains to him the extent to which she is affected by his attitude:

How strange it is the way you try to alter me, to make me quite different! There seems to be a perpetual battering going on at the bulwarks of my character. You want to pull them down and erect new fabrics in their place, fabrics so frothy and unreal that they are hardly more than fancies, and would have to be built up afresh every day.

(S & A, 348)

Knowing he lacks a sense of humour, she playfully describes her anticipation of the future which, she says, she intends to fill with pigs instead of husbands (S & A, 191). Her description of pigs as "remunerative objects" invites an ironic contrast with husbands. Roger has shown himself unable to consider a relationship with Rose-Marie based on equality. He knows that the romance plot would give him the control and superiority that friendship with her cannot give him. Rose-Marie is aware that his social construction would not allow her independence of thought and action were she to submit to him in love and marriage, and he has shown this during his correspondence with her. Rose-Marie has refused to reflect and flatter him, so his counterattack has been to constantly attempt to undermine and diminish her dignity. Yet this has had the opposite effect upon Rose-Marie. The geographical position of elevation on the mountain is synonymous with her increasing empowerment and feeling of superiority over Roger.

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In the writing process, Rose-Marie has maintained her protection and the ability to have full control of her responses, unlike Lucy, who had no protection and internalized the discourse of her oppressor. Rose-Marie has valued the correspondence with Roger as a means of observing the abundant economy of her soul in contrast to the limited economy of his soul. In the writing process, she is better able to observe and understand her soul together with the time and space for reading and reflecting in the garden and elsewhere. These felicitous conditions show her how best to nourish her soul.

Towards the end of the novel, Roger recommences the process of courting her using the iconography and discourse of the convention of romantic love. He tries to lure her with expensive gifts, but Rose-Marie knows their entrapment value. One of the ironies of the romance plot is that the man does the pursuing and, in the process, puts the woman on a "pedestal," elevating her, to a illusion of importance; whereas after marriage, she is subordinated to him. Rose-Marie knows that the elevation is an illusion that denies her full humanity, and she says to Roger:

take me down from the absurd high pinnacle on which you  
persist in keeping me, and on which I have felt so desperately  
uncomfortable for months past. It is infinitely humiliating, I  
do assure you, to be—shall we say venerated?  
(S & A, 363)

This pedestal is another aspect of the symbolism of Rose-Marie's position on

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the Galgenberg mountain. When the first venerating love letter arrives, she strongly warns him that he is seriously jeopardizing the friendship.

Undeterred, Roger asks Rose-Marie to marry him. Her letters, from this point on, become increasingly brief as she reiterates that the relationship has ended on her part because of his betrayal of their friendship. He persists with the romance plot. She plainly tells him that she does not love him, that she will not see him, and that she will never marry him. Roger, in his androcentrism, cannot believe her refusal. She tells him: "it is terrible for us both that you should not understand me to the point, as you say, of not being able to believe me" (S & A, 376). Her last letter consists of one line: "I shall not write again" (S & A, 379). The protective boundaries of her soul are firmly in place. The last letter represents closure, on Rose-Marie's part, towards the romance plot and consequently, she is able to continue and develop female-centred space for her Self.

The implications of *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* for Elizabeth von Arnim's sense of Self are that it was a discourse relating to a complete validation of female-centred space without compromise. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, states: "To construct her new consciousness, the woman must . . . sever her allegiance to the destructive views of the past and transcend the presence of destructive ideologies in herself . . ." (DuPlessis 1985, 127). Rose-Marie is able to achieve this more than any other female protagonist of Elizabeth von Arnim's, and she is able to articulate it more openly than Elizabeth von Arnim herself does in her

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autobiographical writing. *Vera*, in contrast to *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, was symbolically the lowest point on Elizabeth von Arnim's trajectory, as it represented a collapse of all protective boundaries for the female protagonist and a giving away of all power.

In *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, Elizabeth von Arnim takes Rose-Marie to ranges of possibilities and independence that she has not taken any of her female protagonists before, in the interests of protecting and maintaining female-centred space from the universally destructive elements of androcentric culture. Rose-Marie's symbolic position on the Galgenberg ("gallows mountain"), has already been identified as Roger's trial. The gradual shortening of Rose-Marie's letters to Roger signifies the symbolic impending hanging of Roger at the gallows. This is the ultimate refusal of patriarchy by any female protagonist in Elizabeth von Arnim's fiction.

Thomas Moore writes of the soul "[coalescing] into the mysterious philosopher's stone, that rich, solid core of personality the alchemists sought . . . [opening] into the peacock's tail—a revelation of the soul's [colours] and a display of its dappled brilliance" (Moore, 1992, 305). This description illustrates the development of Rose-Marie's soul. It also describes the scope of Elizabeth von Arnim's definition of Self and of Elizabeth von Arnim as a writer, since in this novel, Elizabeth von Arnim can overtly, rather than covertly, refuse the heterosexual love plot in her imagination and transpose it in the text. In *All the Dogs of My Life*, Elizabeth von Arnim says of Rose-Marie that she was her "mouthpiece" (D of L, 63), and it may be said that, in

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effect, Elizabeth had a "relationship" with her female protagonist, Rose-Marie, that had important implications in terms of the process of her self evaluation and revision as a writer. It seems that many of the ideas, concepts and beliefs that Elizabeth von Arnim held, but could not fully articulate in life or other texts, are aired through the voice of Rose-Marie. Rose-Marie writes to Roger on a wide variety of topics such as education, religion, politics, death, child rearing - to name a few - and expresses opinions in areas of life not generally associated with knowledge in women's legitimated domain. However, rather than find her ideas challenging, he rejects them on principle. A further implication of *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* for Elizabeth von Arnim as a writer, is that she was able, through fiction, to explore the cultural iconography and ideology forming the discourse of romantic love in greater depth and detail than in her other texts,

Elizabeth von Arnim's life as lived, in contrast to the manifesto expressed through the character of Rose-Marie, often displayed compromise and ambivalence towards the marriage plot, thereby showing the contradictions and tensions of her fragmentary subjectivity in process. Elizabeth von Arnim was not prepared, as Rose-Marie was with Roger, to directly refuse either her first, or her second husband when they asked her to marry them, and in *All the Dogs of My Life*, she gives the impression of a lack of agency in the act of marrying on both occasions. She enjoyed the status and privileges of being "Countess" von Arnim and, in desiring a continuation of the same status in England after World War 1, she seems to have denied to herself, prenuptially, her knowledge of the destructive qualities of her second husband, in order to



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be "Countess" Russell. Just as Roger invaded Rose-Marie's Galgenberg home, so Francis, Earl Russell invaded Elizabeth von Arnim's space in her alpine home in Switzerland and, like Rose-Marie, she experienced "a descent. . . . [F]rom absolute independence of body and soul" into a state of abjection. Elizabeth von Arnim wrote *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* before the mountain assault by Francis, Earl Russell so, in effect, she was writing her life in advance of living it. As Carolyn Heilbrun says, "[a] woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process" (quoted in Walker 1990, 3). Elizabeth von Arnim, in her text, chose a mountain home for the protection of the female protagonist that she named as "[her] mouthpiece" (D of L, 63), and five years later built her own protective mountain top home as part of a defence for the freedom and felicity of her widowhood.

## 6

### Tails, Trials and Tales of Love

*The [felicitous] space we love is unwilling to remain permanently enclosed. It deploys and appears to move elsewhere without difficulty; into other times, and on different planes of dream and memory.*

—GASTON BACHELARD

*All the Dogs of My Life* was written towards the end of Elizabeth von Arnim's life and is conventionally autobiographical in that the narrative is subjective and the text displays no less than twenty-three photographs. These include scenes of the castle and garden at Nassenheide, Elizabeth von Arnim's children with various dogs, and the greenhouse where she tells the reader that she wrote *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* - with puppies at her feet. However, the unconventional feature of *All the Dogs of My Life* is that her own stories are told within the context of stories about her fourteen dogs, and it is the latter that appear to take precedence.

Furthermore, at frequent intervals throughout the text Elizabeth von Arnim coyly, but knowingly denies its autobiographical genre in what appears to be a rather vague, protective device. Yet in her denial and its contradictions, she inadvertently draws attention to the extensive interanimation of her life with her other texts, some of which have been discussed in this thesis.

The title, *All the Dogs of My Life* is exclusionary in that it reflects Elizabeth von Arnim's deliberate structuring of her life's story entirely

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around her dogs. The title reflects the fact that no human - male or female - who is mentioned or described in the text is given their proper name. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, she refers to her first husband as "the Man of Wrath". In *All the Dogs of My Life*, she refers to him as "the man who married me" (D of L, 19), and her second husband is named "Doom" (D of L, 113). Every dog is given a proper name, and this has the effect of privileging the animal and thereby reversing the hierarchy of "higher" and "lower" forms of life as defined in the patriarchal code. This is indicative of disappointment in Elizabeth von Arnim's relationships with people generally, and is reflected in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and her other writing. Elizabeth "[wondered] at the vast and impassable distance that separates one's own soul from the soul of the person sitting in the next chair" (EGG, 48). Elizabeth von Arnim both experienced and wrote about the paucity of satisfying human companionship - both female and male. The reasons for this paucity have already been analysed throughout this thesis.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *The Solitary Summer*, and *In the Mountains*, Elizabeth von Arnim admits to writing out of a sense of isolation and loneliness, in an attempt to validate herself and her own reality when validation was not forthcoming in her personal relationships. As Felicity Nussbaum says: "in writing to themselves . . . women could create a private place in which to speak the unthought, unsaid and undervalued" (quoted in Spender 1992, 128). Even *All the Dogs of My Life*, although written at a time when Elizabeth von Arnim was free of husbands, was "By the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*" and, once again, provided the protection of distance from authorial responsibility for a writer who was acutely aware of social sanctions and the cost of transgressing them in terms of class.

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Elizabeth, Countess von Arnim was of a similar class to Lady Caroline Dexter, a character in *The Enchanted April*. Lady Caroline feels misunderstood, isolated and lacking in validation of her self and her reality from the other women who, after planning their retreat in Italy as an escape from the men in their lives, decide mid-stream that the company of men is preferable. Caroline's space and freedom were severely limited when the men arrived and consequently, she was unable to express her needs and desires since they conflicted with the competing discourse of the more deeply embedded romance plot. Also, both Elizabeth in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, and Rose-Marie in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, found that the German women's coffee meetings were only gossip sessions and that both women were considered by the others to be marginal because of their distaste for maligning others, as well as their pleasure in gardens and solitude. Luce Irigaray observes that "a male-dominated culture . . . relies on women's renunciation of their relations to other women, and of their unmediated relations to their own bodies and pleasures . . ." (quoted in Grosz 1989, 135).

The title, *All the Dogs of My Life* is ambiguous in two respects. Firstly, it is a story of her life, but under the guise of dogs. If "dogs" are omitted from the title it would read *All . . . My Life*. Secondly, if "dogs" is read in a perjorative sense, the title could mean: *All the "Oppressors" of My Life*. The men in her life and the male protagonists in her texts - almost without exception - refuse to acknowledge women's full humanity and desire for female-centred space. In varying degrees, men adopt the role of the oppressor in the social hierarchies to which Elizabeth von Arnim's texts refer, whether the oppressors are in England, Germany, Italy or Switzerland.

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The title, *All the Dogs of My Life* reflects the subversive content of the text, and this is first glimpsed in the opening paragraph where she states:

I would like, to begin with, to say that though parents, husbands, children, lovers and friends are all very well, they are not dogs. In my day and turn having been each of the above,—except that instead of husbands I was wives,—I know what I am talking about, and am well acquainted with the ups and downs . . . which seem to accompany human loves.

Dogs are free from these fluctuations. Once they love, they love steadily, unchangingly, till their last breath.

That is how I like to be loved.

Therefore I will write of dogs.

(D of L, 3)

The major thematic concern in *All the Dogs of My Life*, which is evident in the above passage, is that of the limitations of conditional love in stereotypical heterosexual relationships as demonstrated by the men in Elizabeth von Arnim's life and text. This is contrasted throughout *All the Dogs of My Life* with the unconditional love that Elizabeth von Arnim wrote about and experienced with the dogs that shared her felicitous, female-centred space. In the texts analysed in this thesis, Elizabeth von Arnim has described the limitations of a variety of different human relationships caused by what she perceives as the restraints of social construction.

In this last autobiographical work, Elizabeth von Arnim juxtaposes husbands, children, and others with dogs. Dogs, like the garden at Nassenheide, represent the unconstructedness of felicitous space. For Elizabeth von Arnim, dogs are a living reminder of unconstructed freedom and unrestrained instincts. Dogs are not concerned with social expectations and codes of behaviour. This is how Elizabeth von Arnim would like to live and love but is unable, except in female-centred space. Dogs also give her the

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consistent experience of unconditional love and loyalty without judgement.

Husbands represent constructed consciousness, restrained instincts and conditional “love”. Elizabeth experienced both her marriages as economic contracts involving a set of conditions and expectations. The first marriage’s contract included the paramount production of a male son and heir, which in Elizabeth’s case, was a painful physical and emotional process. Nevertheless, she was obliged to continue child-bearing until the birth of a son. However, as soon as her children were old enough to receive the formal education according to the strict codes of their German *Junker* class, they became unavailable to Elizabeth for companionship. Describing their education process she says, “Those boxed up children of mine, never to be got at . . . for years still unavailable;—if I wanted a companion, plainly it must be one of the happy, care-free race which can’t be made to do lessons. It must, that is, be a dog” (D of L, 46).

*All the Dogs of My Life* is Elizabeth von Arnim’s final major subversion of the heterosexual love plot. The plot’s ideology is that marriage will fulfil and complete a woman, and this thesis has shown how Elizabeth von Arnim treats this idea ironically by portraying marriage to be a “conclusion” precluding a woman’s development of her Self. In other words, marriage “finishes” a woman’s ability to recreate herself. In this context, Elizabeth tells a story concerning her yearning for another dog after her previous one had died. She begins by describing the long formal meal times at Nassenheide when it was socially unacceptable for anyone seated to talk about private feelings, and she goes on to recall one evening meal in particular, with her husband, their children, two tutors and two governesses. She remembers suddenly exclaiming with passion:

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"One wants to be *complete*". . . . [T]he governesses "groaned agreement. . . . "Ach ja" sighed the German one, fixing her gaze on the new German tutor, who fixed his on his plate, for he was a candidate for Holy Orders, and accordingly cautious. (D of L, 46)

Then Elizabeth's husband offered her another pancake, telling her that if she ate it she would then be complete. Afterwards in private, he asked her if she was wanting another child. In spite of there already being five children, she says he was disappointed when she explained that all she wanted was a dog. No one asked her what she meant by wanting to be "complete". Even her husband, in private, did not ask but assumed he knew what she wanted. Each response is determined by the social construction of each respondent. They all superimpose on her the legitimated fulfilment expected of women: that is, the marriage plot. Elizabeth has experienced and acknowledged to herself that women's legitimated reality lacks fulfilment for her. No-one else at the table can see beyond the ending of the romance plot or understand the way their reality is determined by their construction and belief in social mores. Her illegitimated desire for a dog in this instance appears subversive, since it is juxtaposed with the assumption of women's legitimated reality.

In the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim, a dog is often used as a metaphor for a wife. Elizabeth von Arnim's female protagonists often identify with dogs, as well as other animals, sometimes as small as insects. The effect this has is to exemplify the hierarchical dichotomy of nature and culture which privileges the male and debases women, who are perjoratively identified with nature.<sup>1</sup> The metaphor seems to reflect a conscious recognition, by Elizabeth von Arnim, of women's subjugation in marriage. Women are

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<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, in *Sorties*, explains more of these hierarchical oppositions in relation to their effect upon women.

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expected to give unconditional love - like a dog - even when kicked physically or psychologically. In *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* Rose-Marie writes to Roger:

No man can possibly go on loving a dreary woman. . . . A dreary man is bad enough, but he would be endured because we endure every variety of man with so amazing a patience; but a dreary woman is unforgivable, hideous.  
(S & A, 71)

In other words, the love a woman receives, in and out of marriage, is conditional on her not being "dreary," whereas the man can expect a woman to give unconditional love - like a dog - despite his dreariness. This is partly because the marriage contract, in Elizabeth von Arnim's time, was one that ensured a woman's economic dependence upon her husband, and therefore as the subservient partner, she was beholden to him. Today, however, even with seemingly egalitarian Matrimonial Property Acts, women face the stigma of the aging process in ways that men don't. As Naomi Wolf observes, "our eyes are trained to see time as a flaw on women's faces where it is a mark of character on men's" (Wolf 1991, 93-94). Elizabeth von Arnim struggled in the latter part of her life with the aging process and is known to have had cosmetic surgery to her face on several occasions. In two of her later novels, *Mr Skeffington* and *Love*, the politics of women's aging is Elizabeth von Arnim's major thematic focus.

In the early part of *Vera*, the narrator describes how Lucy and her aunt "watched him [Wemyss], with the devout attentiveness of two dogs" (V, 38). Towards the end of the novel, however, Lucy's aunt, experienced "the sensation of wriggling . . . like an earwig beneath a stone, and it humiliated her to wriggle" (V, 298). The simile of the earwig under the stone shows the



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aunt's infelicitous experience of her position in the patriarchal hierarchy as an older, unmarried woman, as well as the weight of that construction upon her. When Wemyss punishes Lucy by locking her out of the house in the pouring rain, Lizzie the maid tends to Lucy on her return inside and observes her wretched state: "Lizzie knew what long-haired dogs look like when they are being soaped, and she was also familiar with cats as they appear after drowning" (V, 191). These similes describe the increasingly diminished and endangered state of Lucy. The simile relating to the dog is repeated when the narrator states that when Lucy accompanied Wemyss in the garden she "kept close to his heels" (V, 243), like a dog. The simile is both perjorative and subjugative.

Women, in the novels of Elizabeth von Arnim, are expected to remain in patriarchal space and display the devotion of dogs to both fathers and husbands. It is a devotion that asks no questions, requests no female-centred space, and gives unconditional love around the clock. Lucy is likened to a dog that has suffered continual cruel and inhumane treatment from its master: "She was afraid . . . her nerve would give out and she would collapse. Collapse deplorably; into just something that howled and whimpered" (V, 218). It is therefore deeply ironical, when considered retrospectively, that Wemyss, after a time of intense psychological abuse of Lucy, tells her, "I've been sitting watching you like a . . . faithful dog while you slept . . . waiting patiently till you woke up and only wanting to forgive you" (V, 210).

In *The Enchanted April*, on a cold, wet day in London, Mrs Wilkins "sat looking at Mrs Arbuthnot with the eyes of an imprisoned dog" (EA, 9). Once positioned in sunny Italy, Mrs Wilkins appreciates the physicality of her newly discovered female-centred space, but does not fully understand its

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significance in her life. She soon begins to feel remorse for experiencing such an abundance of pleasure without her husband. It is therefore ironic when she says to Mrs Arbuthnot, "'I've been a mean dog'" (EA, 167). Firstly, this symbolizes a denial of her pleasure, and secondly, in classifying herself as a dog, Mrs Wilkins is implying that she is less than human. However, she goes further in her deprecation of herself when she attributes consciousness of the quality of meanness to an animal. This is another example of the dog metaphor used perjoratively.

In *All the Dogs of My Life*, Elizabeth recounts the story of a dog of hers which dies as a result of a hit and run driver. Driving home from the veterinary surgery with its dead body, she observes as she passes, a small overloaded donkey,

plodding stoutly along, doing his best for the enormous man sitting on a pile of household goods who was driving him. But doing his best didn't save him from being hit. He was hit hard and often. And looking at the man's face, I thought that to an overworked donkey, to a kicked dog, to a pelted cat, it may well seem that this is a world of devils.  
(D of L, 199)

This passage is an oblique reference to the oppression of the man over those lower in the patriarchal hierarchy. The donkey represents a further extension of the metaphor of dogs in her writing because of the association of the donkey as a traditional "beast of burden" with which Elizabeth identifies. In a biblical context, the donkey has associations with sacrifice and death, since it was a donkey that carried Christ through Jerusalem just before his crucifixion. The meaning of this passage is encoded, and in the context of reflecting on the death of her dog, has a number of connotations. Since

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Elizabeth cannot overtly say that patriarchy and its ideology of marriage are abhorrent to her and her values, she instead utilizes symbols and imagery. Elizabeth was writing in a time where it was crucial for women writers, as Judy Simons observes, to adopt strategies of concealment [in their writing] . . . to remain in society's good graces" (Simons, in Spender 1992, 135). In failing to recognise the necessity for concealment, Elizabeth would risk being named as a termagant, thus being alienated from her reading public.

In Elizabeth von Arnim's writing, vegetarianism is a further extension of her identification with animals. Vegetarianism represents a space of resistance and refusal in her texts, since vegetarianism symbolically renders the traditional male hunter redundant, with the consequence that a woman's nourishment can be obtained independently of the male and the necessity to kill. Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, (EGG, 11), and Rose-Marie, in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, both experiment with vegetarianism (S & A, 129-137). As Carol J. Adams states: "In the works of modern women writers, the intrusion into the text of a vegetarian incident announces a subversion of the dominant world order, enacted by the textual strategy of interruption" (Adams 1989, 257).

Interruption is a textual strategy by which silencing is overcome. In *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, when Roger attempts to silence Rose-Marie, she "interrupts" with lengthy, detailed letters devoted to her experimentation with vegetarianism. This has the effect of deflecting attention away from Roger's desire that she comply with the terms the romance plot in the content of her letters. Carol J. Adams describes the strategy of interruption as providing "a protected space" within the novel (Adams 1989, 258). Elizabeth von Arnim belongs to a group of women

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writers who use vegetarianism in their texts as a strategy to reject male violence, to identify with the possession, use and abuse of animals, and as a repudiation of men's control over women and war.

Rachel DuPlessis suggests that when female marginality is "in dialogue with dominance it invokes the position of animals who are also on the margins" (quoted in Adams 1989, 262). *All the Dogs of My Life* is a dialogue between marginal female-centred space and its identification with animals and dominant male-centred space. In *All the Dogs of My Life*, dogs represent independence for women and release from the need for heterosexual relationships. Dogs provide unconditional love as well as elements of protection that are associated with the myth of the male as protector. Elizabeth shows that a women's independence from heterosexual relationships is possible, through every season of a woman's life, if she has canine companionship in female-centred space. In the loneliness of her early married life at Nassenheide, Elizabeth von Arnim describes her relationship with her dog, Cornelia, as if she was speaking from the resistant subject position of lesbianism:

That first year of marriage, Cornelia and I were everything to each other. Fortunately, we liked the same things. She only wanted to be out of doors in the sun, and so did I. Expeditions to the nearer woods soon became our daily business, and the instant my husband . . . had lurched off round the first corner, we were off round the opposite one, disappearing as quickly as we could, almost scuttling, in our eagerness to be gone beyond reach and sight of the servants.  
(D of L, 24-25)

Here, Elizabeth von Arnim combines her recurrent metaphor of gardens and the wild outdoors with her metaphor of dogs. It is as if Cornelia is complicit

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in the escape from the oppressions that Elizabeth associates with indoors and male-centred space elsewhere.

In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim defines herself in relation to her garden. In *All the Dogs of My Life*, she defines herself in relation to her dogs and their association with female-centred space. The language with which she describes her feelings for many of her dogs has a passion that descriptions of human relationships in her autobiographical and fictional writing never contain. For instance, she describes her introduction to Cornelia after a year of married life : "We immediately loved. At sight we loved. Far better than any ring was that blessed . . . dog" (D of L, 23). This contrasts with Elizabeth von Arnim's ambivalence when Count von Arnim proposed to her and placed a ring on her finger that had belonged to his first wife, as though she was a replacement chattel (D of L, 20). The romance plot is effectively displaced in *All the Dogs of My Life* so that there is a shift of emphasis from men to dogs.

The following quotation has been selected to show the *extent* of the felicity that the combination of the freedom and beauty of outdoors with fulfilling canine companionship provides for Elizabeth von Arnim, when it is considered as an implicit contradiction to the androcentric space and its symbolism of the construct of male-centred culture indoors:

I would make for the open; and once in it, *once safe*, how happy Cornelia and I were! We frisked across the *unreproachful* fields, laughing and talking—I swear she laughed and talked,—to the cover of the nearest wood. . . . What could be more perfect? *Nothing out there, minded what we did.* The March wind, blowing my skirt all anyhow, and causing Cornelia's ears to stream out behind her, *didn't*

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*care a fig that I was a fleeing Hausfrau; the woods, when we got to them—those clear light woods of silver birches, free from obscuring undergrowth,—welcomed us with beauty, just as though I were as deserving as anybody else. Pale beauty it was, in a pale sun; beauty of winter delicately dying, of branches bare, except for mistletoe. But beneath the branches were the first signs of spring, for down among last year's dead leaves, in groups, in patches, in streams, and in some places in lakes, hepaticas were beginning to cover the ground with their heavenly blue. . . . I often wondered, I remember, whether any human being could be happier than I was then. . . . I asked nothing better of life. I still ask nothing better of life. . . . [J]ust sun on my face, the feel of spring round the corner, and nobody anywhere in sight except a dog, are still enough to fill me with utter happiness.*

(D of L, 26-27, emphasis added)

This passage shows an extension of Elizabeth von Arnim's love of the unconstructed outdoor spaces of nature, as described in her other writings, with her love of dogs as expressed in *All the Dogs of My Life*. In *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth did not mention her love of dogs, and in *All the Dogs of My Life* she alludes to the reason. She recalls her husband's response to the blossoming of the relationship with her dog Cornelia: "Do not," interrupted my husband, "kiss the dog. No dog should be kissed. I have provided you, for kissing purposes, with myself" (D of L, 23). Elizabeth, in the passage above (D of L, 28), is describing a heightened dimension of felicitous female-centred space that she was not able to speak about in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* due to the sanctions her husband exercised over the content of that text.

If the phrases that are emphasised in the passage above (D of L, 26-27), are transposed from the positive into the negative, the impression gained exposes the underlying Other reality to be prison-like: a place of entrapment

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where there is reproach, judgement, disapproval and a sense of being made to feel undeserving and unwelcome.

The implications of this encoded passage for Elizabeth von Arnim's sense of Self, and for her as a writer, may be encapsulated in the words of the eighteenth century writer, Fanny Burney, who said: "I would a thousand times rather forfeit my character as a writer than risk ridicule or censor as a female" (Simons 1992, 126). Elizabeth von Arnim, like Fanny Burney experienced a conflict between her authorship and her gender throughout her literary career which was never fully resolved (Simons 1992, 126). The oblique mode of expression that both of them used, and which is exemplified in the passage (D of L, 26-27), is a compromise in attempting to solve this conflict: the conflict of not being able to speak or write their reality forthrightly without the untenable censoring of a literary career. Elizabeth von Arnim designed her text as artfully as she designed her garden at Nassenheide: There was a "a merging of cultivated plants with the wild" (EGG, xi), the cultivated plants representing the surface conventionality, and the wild plants representing the subversive subtext.

Historically, the dominant male culture has censored women from articulating their pleasure or lack of pleasure, just as women's claiming of time and space for themselves was considered to be undutiful and therefore indulgent. Rose-Marie Schmidt, in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* however, does articulate a wide variety of her pleasures at length, as well as articulating the kind of heterosexual relationship she desires for herself. She wants to develop a *conscious* relationship: an alternative to the conventional conditional and dutiful "love" of marriage. She visualises a non-hierarchical relationship of equals, where difference is admired and

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respected. Rose-Marie perceives a relationship as a path that can facilitate two people in developing a greater consciousness and in expanding their sense of who they individually are. She believes a relationship between a man and a woman should be “a living *process*, never a finished *product*” (Welwood 1990, 7). It is only in her fiction that Elizabeth von Arnim articulates her idea of an alternative kind of heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman. In *All the Dogs of My Life*, the only feasible alternative to heterosexuality is a relationship with a dog. Rose-Marie experiences the impossibility of an alternative kind of heterosexual relationship, (the qualities of which have been explained in Chapter Five), through her unsatisfying communication with Roger, and comes to understand the unresolvable contradictions of the social convention of romance and marriage, and so finally rejects these in favour of independence.

Elizabeth wrote *All the Dogs of My Life* from a felicitous position within the text. Her decision to move, towards the end of her life, from the infelicitous space of the relentless cold, rain, wind and smog of London, to the consistently sunny, scented air of Provence provides an interanimation with her life and texts examined in this thesis. The following is an example:

There was another friend of mine—a woman this time—who was living beautifully in the sun. . . . The light and warmth of a more blessed climate seemed still to linger round her, she seemed still to reflect the sunshine she had left, and whenever she moved I fancied there was delicately shaken into the air a fragrance of sweet flowers, such as jasmine.

“Why not come and live near me?” she said.  
(D of L, 175)

Here, at Le Mas des Roses, the house and garden which she renovated to her own specifications, was the felicitous and female-centred space where she



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chose to reflect on all the paths of her life as well as all her dogs. She says, "It is in [this] little house . . . expanded at each end to a greater roominess and turned the colours of honeysuckle, that I am at this moment writing" (D of L, 176). This declaration recalls an almost identical statement in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* where Elizabeth von Arnim also positions herself within the text by saying in the first paragraph, "I am writing in [the garden] now in the late afternoon loveliness" (EGG, 1). Both quotations demonstrate the writing of her Self - Elizabeth - into the text, as well as being further evidence of interanimations between her life and text.

*All the Dogs of My Life* vividly contrasts felicitous and infelicitous spaces of her life. When she describes meeting her second husband, Francis, Earl Russell, the contrast is extreme, since the story involves her most loved and devoted dog, Coco, with the man who was most destructive to her felicity. The context of the story involves the felicitous space of her years as a widow, which she describes with a strong sense of agency, especially when recounting her move to live in Switzerland: "I changed the air. Widows are mobile creatures, and can change any amount of air choosing how and where they will live in a way unknown to wives" (D of L, 77). Elizabeth von Arnim built her own house in Montana, one of the sunniest and least rained upon places in the Swiss Alps. This geographical choice shows an interanimation of her life with the sun-filled symbolism of felicitous space in many of her texts. Furthermore, she called the house Chalet Soleil,<sup>2</sup> and wrote over the front door, "ONLY HAPPINESS HERE" (Usborne 1986, 166).

Chalet Soleil was a greater felicitous space than Nassenheide and its garden, since there was no husband in residence. Chalet Soleil proved to be

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<sup>2</sup> Means "sun".

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just what she hoped it would be: "a house of happiness" (D of L, 78). Of her behaviour at this time she says, "it was altogether as persons do behave who have lately, for the first time in their lives, become completely free, and responsible to no authority of any kind" (D of L, 78). Coco, a large dog and native to the region, shared this immense felicitous space with Elizabeth. She recalls: "there was a quality about this happiness I hadn't till then known, *a something more deeply interfused*, as Wordsworth put it" (D of L, 85). Her quotation from Wordsworth, is also a continuation of the interanimated way in which she drew from a variety of literary sources to enhance not only her texts, but to enrich her quality of life. Elizabeth's sense of felicitous space was made complete by Coco who,

was so intelligent that to be with him was like being with an unusually delightful companion of one's own species, supposing such a companion could be found who, besides being delightful, was entirely devoted, loving and uncritical.  
(D of L, 79)

There were two significant threats to the protection and maintenance of this female-centred space at Chalet Soleil. The first was the uninvited visit of her second husband-to-be, Francis, Earl Russell. During the visit to Chalet Soleil he effectively confined and enclosed Elizabeth, since he preferred sitting indoors to enjoying the alpine air and she adopted the passive role of the heroine in the romance plot, recalling that she "sunk in acquiescence" (D of L, 116) during his stay. With hindsight she says,

I can't account for my behaviour. I had never before felt any desire to serve, to obey, to stand with bowed head and hands folded, to be, as it were, the handmaid of the lord. But from the first I was meek and pliable, giving in without a struggle, overcome by that strange sensation of God's hands.  
(D of L, 119)

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The religious discourse that Elizabeth von Arnim uses seems to be an ironic explanation for her own lack of understanding as to how she could give up her felicitous autonomy and allow a man to exercise such power and control over her.

Coco seemed to reflect Elizabeth's own lack of discernment from the moment the second husband-to-be walked through the door at Chalet Soleil. Coco "rushed to give him the welcome suitable to so important an arrival. He was, in fact, all over him. 'Come in, come in—oh, *do* come in! This is our house, but from now on it is yours and everything in it,' he seemed to be passionately conveying by leaps, licks, waggings, and loud, glad yelps" (D of L, 116). Elizabeth von Arnim remembers that when she was alone a "sinking feeling" (D of L, 122) would frequently come over her, and it was only remembering Coco's enthusiasm for the match that buoyed her up. Elizabeth is describing from her experience how the romance plot can, as it were, lie dormant in an autonomous woman, and if she fails to adequately protect her female-centred space she will quickly lose the space and consequently, her independence.

The second intrusion into the felicitous space of Chalet Soleil was the onset of World War 1. Food supplies were requisitioned for the Swiss army, and Elizabeth and two of her daughters "were alone and unprotected . . . living in momentary fear of being raped and pillaged by soldiers" (Usborne 1986, 179). What compromised Elizabeth's ability to maintain the quality of her female-centred space at Chalet Soleil were two deeply embedded patriarchal social conventions: war and marriage. The onset of war left Elizabeth in a vulnerable position, having both German affiliations with

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English parentage. After escaping to England, she and her children remained vulnerable with a German name. Elizabeth, in leaving Chalet Soleil, paradoxically made herself still more vulnerable in terms of her physical proximity to Francis, Earl Russell in London.

It was in this context that she left Chalet Soleil and her most cherished dog who,

[watched] her drive away into what were to be years of deep sorrow, of acute misery—my beautiful dog, my close friend, my adoring protector, *my dog I had so much loved and cared for, and who had so much loved and cared for me*. And when next I saw him, five years later, he was dying.  
(D of L, 136, emphasis added)

This passage describes the equality of the relationship Elizabeth von Arnim was able to create with her dogs as opposed to the inequality experienced with her husbands. When viewed within the context of her quest for felicity, there are many passages similar in tone to the one above in *All the Dogs of My Life* that are also subversive in terms of Elizabeth von Arnim's indictment of the institution of marriage and the rigid gender constructions associated with the confines of patriarchy.

There is a silence in *All the Dogs of My Life* concerning the five years of World War 1 and marriage to Francis, Earl Russell. Elizabeth had no canine companionship during those years and all she would write about that time was: "I hadn't known wretchedness could be packed so tight" (D of L, 143). As already discussed in a previous chapter, Elizabeth von Arnim, on finally escaping from her second husband, interanimates this part of her life as lived with her text, as imagined and written in *Vera*.

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*All the Dogs of My Life* and *In the Mountains* are two texts that interanimate with the time of Elizabeth von Arnim's final separation from Francis, Earl Russell. *In the Mountains* was originally published anonymously, and Elizabeth von Arnim "vigorously and consistently denied authorship for what [her husband] might devise in terms of libel suits" (Usborne 1986, 221-222). It is written in the form of a diary by an unnamed female protagonist who returns to her alpine home "that used to be so full of happy life" (I M, 1) after an absence of five years in which there was war and a deep, unidentified, personal grief. Elizabeth, of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, directly locates herself in the text of *In the Mountains* in a number of different ways. The female protagonist initially returns to her home and garden in the alps in order to access "its spaciousness and healing" (I M, 2). She is experiencing a deep psychological depression, and on the morning of her return "crawled up . . . from the valley like a sick ant" (I M, 1). In terms of her identity, she wants to understand her past and develop a sense of the present as well as the future. She is gradually restored to her sense of Self in ways that are reminiscent of Elizabeth's healing experience in the garden at Nassenheide after the misery of five years spent in Berlin. The descriptions of felicitous space in *In the Mountains* recall Elizabeth, in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, and *The Solitary Summer*. The female protagonist of *In the Mountains* has the recognisable *voice* and felicitous experiences of Elizabeth, the speaking subject in the latter two books, as she describes experiencing the pleasure of colours, scents, sounds and textures in her alpine garden, as well as lying on the grass and extending her gaze to the clouds and to the surroundings forests and vista.

An important part of this unnamed protagonist's healing process is her love of books and reading. Like Elizabeth von Arnim, in her earlier

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autobiographical writing, this woman loves reading, arranging and fondling her books (I M, 12). When her healing is near completion, she takes a walk to a favourite spot of "wide sun-flooded spaces with nothing between one apparently and the great snowy mountains" (I M, 39). The imagery of the sunlight is symbolic, as has been shown throughout her texts, of the experience of felicitous space.

Although having written *All the Dogs of My Life* in her seventies, Elizabeth von Arnim was still bound by social conventions that limited the degree of her textual explicitness of the extreme felicities and infelicities of her life. Despite this, she was able to contrast and compare new dimensions of felicitous space with new depths of infelicitous space in this text. However, if she had not experienced the sanctions and censorship, Elizabeth von Arnim would perhaps not have developed her skills as a writer to the extent that she did, especially in her use of the device of irony. Although, perhaps despite the sanctions, she felt a personal need to protect certain areas of her life.

Elizabeth von Arnim's ability to create, protect, and maintain female-centred space was seriously compromised by two marriages and one war. In the situations in which she found herself, it was expedient for her to maintain her class status and to make connections with patriarchal institutions, paradoxically, in order to be protected from them. The irony of this is that, for Elizabeth von Arnim, this resulted in personal damage through a lack of protection and this is reflected in her writing.

The significance of *All the Dogs of My Life* intratextually, is that the dogs have been used as a triple metaphor: in one sense, relating to the subordinate

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position of “wife”; in another sense, relating to the unconditional love expected of wives in contrast to the conditional, contractual “love” of husbands; and thirdly, as a genuine companion outside of patriarchal hierarchies. In telling the story of her life by privileging her dogs literally and metaphorically, Elizabeth von Arnim not only subverts the marriage plot and its hierarchical order, but also continues the development of the double narrative that is a feature of the other texts in this thesis.

## Conclusion

This thesis has dealt with the problematic of examining the work of a prolific woman writer whose life interanimated with her text. The challenge experienced in the research and writing process of this thesis was to find an appropriate analytical strategy which could do justice to the complex layers of signification in the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim. These layers of signification involve the use of literary devices such as metaphor, simile, and irony in the development of a subversive double narrative that illuminates and privileges the concept of felicitous space from a female-centred point of view.

The thesis has demonstrated that Elizabeth von Arnim as Author, is far from being dead in the Barthesian sense of "the death of the author," but is very much "alive" throughout her writings. The thesis has shown ways in which her life interanimates with her texts and conversely, how her texts interanimate with her life. A dialectical movement created by the interanimation of Elizabeth von Arnim's life and her text has been traced and explored throughout the thesis. In the process, an expanding trajectory reflecting her quest for felicity and the growth of her soul has emerged. If the Author's disappearance had been adopted within the methodology of analysis used in the thesis, then the intricate patterns of interanimation between life and text which Elizabeth von Arnim purposefully used for the development of her personal career as well for as her literary career, would have remained hidden. Biographical evidence, which includes quotations from private diary entries, has supported the contention of this thesis regarding the interanimation of Elizabeth von Arnim's life with her texts.



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The thesis has demonstrated how Elizabeth von Arnim, in her autobiographical and fictional writings, presents a variety of female subject positions that reflect some of the subject positions that Elizabeth von Arnim herself experienced in the course of her life. Hugh Walpole, who was a close friend of Elizabeth von Arnim's, confirmed the validity of the interanimation between her life and text when he wrote in her obituary: "All her novels were sooner or later autobiography" (quoted in Usborne 1986, 312).

The consequence of theoretically annihilating Elizabeth von Arnim as Author, would have meant denying the significance and richness of her dual narrative and its connection with the major thematic concern in her writing: that of female-centred space. The two together are integral parts of Elizabeth von Arnim's development of Self through the writing process.

The importance of considering the role of an Author such as Elizabeth von Arnim is also distinguished from writers in the male domain by Nancy K. Walker in her essay, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader," where she argues:

that the postmodernist decision that the Author is dead, and subjective agency along with him, does not necessarily work for women and prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not . . . felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis and hence [decentred], "disoriginated," deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different.  
(Walker 1986, 106)

"Subjective agency" underpins the writing process of Elizabeth von Arnim, as

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well as underpinning the significance of her writing. Her emergence as a writer in Germany co-existed with her female status as, (in her own words), "a nobody" (EGG, 116), in German society. Men have not had to write themselves into existence because they *are* "the polis". Therefore, as Nancy K. Walker concludes, the female subject's relation to her text, her desire and her authority is inevitably different in structure from the male subject's relation to his text, desire and authority. As has been shown in the thesis, there are many interrelating issues that nourish the central theme of felicitous space which would be lost with the postmodernist analysis conceptualising the death of the Author.

This thesis has also emphasised that it was the physicality and metaphor of the garden that enabled Elizabeth von Arnim to recognise her difference from her husband, as well as the people of her adopted country, Germany. His and their codes of behaviour and belief systems were impressed and imposed upon her to such an extent that it led her to seek alternative, non-exploitative, unconditional forms of companionship that she could safely and pleasurably relate to, such as her garden and her dogs. As Luce Irigaray states: "In order for woman to find/make an identity for herself, she must situate herself (and be situated by others) within a natural or celestial order. The natural and stellar provide the broadest context for [female] subjects" (explained in Grosz 1989, 180). This quotation clearly demonstrates the importance to Elizabeth von Arnim's identity in situating her Self within the natural order of her garden, (and later, in an identification with animals), and thereafter being situated by others through her insistence on being known as "the Author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*". Since she could not directly express the experience of both her public and private agony, or even

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her ecstasy in the female-centred space of her garden to any human being, she consequently wrote *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and, in doing so, wrote her Self into existence as Elizabeth. This renaming of her Self symbolized a recognition by Elizabeth von Arnim that she had become conscious of a private part of her inner being which she named as her soul, distinguishing it, as well as privileging it from public aspects of herself. In her "ethics of alterity,"<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray has perceived that in order "[to] be able to live the present as one's own, it is also necessary to have some conception of the future. This future need not be predictable, a plan or projection of step-by-step progression. Rather a trajectory, a broad direction, a *mode of becoming* is necessary" (explained in Grosz 1989, 180). Through an analysis of the texts selected for this thesis, it has been shown that Elizabeth von Arnim's trajectory has the broad direction of a mode of becoming.

By embodying her soul, Elizabeth von Arnim's wrote herself into her text, and in this way she was in the process of becoming while in the process of writing. This expanded her embodied experience and understanding of felicitous and infelicitous space. Her trajectory was propelled by living as fully as possible in the present, as well as by a projection into the future of self-chosen ideals and paths of development. Its shape has also been shown as circular and organic, in that it reflects cycles of understanding and degrees of success and failure at creating, maintaining and developing felicitous space. It also expands, as additional aspects of Elizabeth von Arnim's life experiences, imagination and understanding are reflected to varying degrees in her literary works.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Sexual Subversions*, Chapter Five, "Luce Irigaray and the Ethics of Alterity," Elizabeth Grosz gives a comprehensive explanation of Irigaray's theory of "the ethics of alterity".

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The importance not only of her renaming her Self, but of renaming her oppressors throughout her writings, has been stressed as crucial for her freedom to begin the process of becoming. Elizabeth von Arnim's awareness of her dual self influenced her writing of a double narrative, in which she juxtaposed her soul's voice - the voice demonstrating her process of becoming - with the voice of her socially formulated self, and this resulted in a subversive subtext. Within this subtext, her fluid, open-ended alternative identity views the fixed, socially created self ironically. Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates "a mode of defiance" (Irigaray, explained in Grosz 1989, 135), towards the patriarchal order within her dual narrative. Her use of irony has been shown to be an effective means by which she can distance and detach sufficiently enough from her oppressions and oppressors to write her Self consistently and imaginatively into her text. It is a device that is so pervasive in her writing that she may be said to have an ironic soul. As Nancy A. Walker says: "conventional notions of the self are postulated on the experience of the dominant—male—culture, and fail to take into account the circumstances in which women . . . encounter the concept" (Walker 1990, 76).

With its superior stance, irony is a means by which Elizabeth von Arnim can gain control over that which has dominated her, diffusing the power and rendering the dominators absurd. The process of naming her alternative reality in a female-centred space, and contrasting it with the daily reality of patriarchal space with its oppressions and duties, actually transformed reality in general for her, and this was instrumental for her process of becoming in both her personal and literary career. Elizabeth von Arnim's writing has been clearly shown to be a subversion of the romance genre, and her classification therefore, as a writer of romance novels has been proven in this thesis to be

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incorrect. Elizabeth von Arnim experienced heterosexual romantic love as a recurrent, oppressive social narrative in her life, and in her writing she reveals the oppression of that narrative. She shows romantic love to be an externally formulated construction, and destroys its illusions by writing beyond the ending of the marriage plot.

However, in *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, Elizabeth von Arnim proposes an alternative kind of heterosexual relationship where “love [can be] a movement of becoming that allows the one and the other to grow. . . . [W]ith no preconceived goal or end for either” (Irigaray, quoted in Grosz 1989, 170). This reveals a vision of the process of becoming that is actually enhanced by a heterosexual relationship, rather than hindered or destroyed by it. *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* shows Elizabeth von Arnim’s idea of a fertile exchange between a man and a woman to be “where neither can subsume the other, [and] neither is master of the dialogue circulating between them” (Irigaray, explained in Grosz 1989, 182). In the writing of *Fräulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther*, Elizabeth von Arnim has created a conscious space in which this possibility of an alternative kind of relationship between the sexes may be explored. Through the failure of Roger to understand Rose-Marie’s confrontational attitude, or accept the challenge that she was offering him in terms of an alternative relationship between herself and himself, Elizabeth von Arnim demonstrates that the widespread deconstruction of ideologies and belief systems continues to be imperative if such an alternative kind of relationship is to move from theory to practice.

The thesis has explained how Elizabeth von Arnim varied the form of her writing to accommodate the extent of personal, marital, and public sanctions and censorship. She commenced her literary career in conjunction

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with a personal career of contradictions. These contradictions involved responsibilities and duties as a member of the German aristocracy, including the production of children - especially a son and heir - while developing a consciousness that was increasingly Other to the conventions and expectations of an extremely patriarchal society. These tensions extended to her literary and her personal career and were reflected in both. Elizabeth von Arnim seems to have utilized the only option available to her which was writing, in order to relate her reality through the more protective mediums of autobiography and fiction. It cannot be said that even these literary genres were neutral because of the censorship associated with them that has already been explained in this thesis.

In her initial experimental text, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Elizabeth von Arnim employed the subjective narrative method of diary form - a continuation of the conventional tradition of women's private writing - however, the autobiographical content is expressed imaginatively and often encoded as a critique of established values. She continued to use the subjective narrative method for *The Solitary Summer* and *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rügen* and returned to the method at a later date when she wrote *In the Mountains*. In the period between, she experimented with the form of fiction to extend the boundaries of her voice in times of greater private and public oppression.

As has been demonstrated, it was not only the writing process that empowered Elizabeth von Arnim, but also the *jouissance* of the reading process. Reading from a wide variety of sources introduced her to a stimulating range of literary, philosophical, political, educational and religious concepts which animated her soul and hence, her writing. It has

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been shown throughout the texts examined, the extent to which books contributed to Elizabeth von Arnim's evolving consciousness concerning felicitous space. Texts by other authors - especially of poetry and subjective narrative - are discussed and quoted in her autobiographical writing and in her fiction, interweaving with her own texts to illuminate and enhance them in particular ways. It is clear that books directly influenced her life as lived, as imagined and as written.

Elizabeth von Arnim's personal motto was PARVA SED APTA (Small but effective). She was short in stature, just as her texts were never of great length, but this thesis has clearly demonstrated the "effectivity"<sup>2</sup> of her writing. The writer of this thesis has experienced, in the reading process, the effectivity of Elizabeth von Arnim's writing. However, in my research, I found an absence of in depth critical literary analysis relating to the significance of the writings of Elizabeth von Arnim. The introductions to the Virago Press editions of her texts were found to be generally superficial and designed to appeal to the popular readership of the romance novel which, as Nancy A. Walker says, "reinforces and validates the marriage plot rather than proposing alternative realities for women" (Walker 1990, 36). The introductions to Elizabeth von Arnim's texts do not adequately acknowledge the subversive dimension of her writing or, more specifically, her pervasive and empowering use of irony resulting in a double narrative. As D. C. Muecke posits: "the relativity implicit in irony —the ability to stand apart from conventional values and systems—requires an unsentimental intelligence and a courageous wit, qualities not easily compatible with the traditional expectations of women" (quoted in Walker 1990, 27). The fact that

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Weedon uses this term in connection with the reading process in *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory* (171).

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irony challenges perceptions of reality means that irony can either be misunderstood or considered a threat by both women and men.

Condemning Elizabeth von Arnim's writing to the "popular status" of the romance genre, implies a failure to see that, as a writer, Elizabeth von Arnim belongs to a particular tradition of women's writing that can be traced back to the early eighteenth century; a tradition that deconstructed oppressive social codes and addressed radical issues relating to the construction of gender. In Elizabeth von Arnim's writing, as in the writing of the female literary tradition to which she belongs, a "mutinous subtext . . . can be detected that is at odds with the surface conventionality" (Simons 1992, 129). However, the "mutinous subtext" can be more effectively detected and understood by utilizing the framework of critical feminist and literary theoretical concepts and perspectives that have been applied in this thesis.



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